

YUSPENSKAYA

OUR
SUMMER

LIBRARY OF SELECTED SOVIET LITERATURE

Y. USPENSKAYA

OUR SUMMER

A Novel



E. Чесноков



Е. УСПЕНСКАЯ

НАШЕ ЛЕТО

ПОВЕСТЬ

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО
ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
Москва 1954



Y. USPENSKAYA

OUR SUMMER

A NOVEL

FOREIGN LANGUAGES
PUBLISHING HOUSE
Moscow 1954

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN
BY IVY LITVINNOVA
AND MARGARET WETTLIN

ILLUSTRATED BY B. SEMYONO V

DESIGNED BY I. LITVISHKO



AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Our Summer, my first novel, is based on experience covering a much longer period of time than that given in the book, and if I am to speak about it, it will be necessary to go a long way back.

I joined the circle of young naturalists attached to the Moscow Zoological Gardens at the age of nine. Ever since, the little green house on the edge of Swan's Pond, and the broad tree-lined walks of the Zoo have been a second home to me. Our circle was conducted by the celebrated professor Pyotr Alexandrovich Manteufel, at that time head of the Zoological Gardens' scientific department. He is now a Stalin Prize winner. Pyotr Alexandrovich, a gifted zoologist and a born teacher, developed in us the accuracy, observational powers, and patience essential to a naturalist.

Skill and knowledge did not come all at once. We had to begin from the very beginning. We helped the Zoo employees to look after the animals, fed and tamed those entrusted to our care. I shall never forget my first task. The Professor led me to a large open-air cage in which perched eleven absolutely identical owls, all of them grey, dejected-looking, and motionless, and told me that I must get to know each one "personally". It was only after spending hours a day before the cage for three months that I at last learned to distinguish these creatures, so desperately alike, by almost imperceptible differences. We often made journeys to the woods around Moscow, and Manteufel gradually drew the older and more experienced members of the circle, who sometimes took part in expeditions to distant parts, into scientific work. We heard lectures and reports, and held scientific discussions. All our mem-

bers were good pupils in their respective schools, for no one who got bad marks in school was allowed in the circle. Most of us passed examinations enabling us to act as guides in the Zoo, and even while still school children we were given this most interesting task.

The years of my early youth will always remain in my memory—vehement disputes at meetings, dawn in the woods, the hours of standing watch over birds' nests, during which violent attacks by mosquitoes had to be endured. In "Our Circle", the severe "boy's" laws of friendship, comradeship, honour, and endurance were faithfully observed. I still meet with some of my comrades from the circle, and most of them have been true to the aspirations of their youthful days. Biologists, who began their life as naturalists in the young naturalists' circle of the Zoological Gardens, are now working all over our country. I myself never thought I should one day choose another profession. As a schoolgirl, everything seemed clear to me—first the biological faculty of the university, then work in my favourite field, as a full-blown biologist.

But in my last few years at school I had begun to be drawn towards literature and the drama. We had a splendid literature teacher in the higher classes—Praskovya Andreyevna Shevchenko. She is still teaching in the same school, has been awarded the Order of Lenin, and has become a corresponding member of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences. It was she who aroused in me a deep interest in literature, and I began to try my hand at short stories, essays, and even poetry, at which, by the way, I was never much good.

We had a well-organized dramatic circle in our school. Unluckily my first attempts at acting were more or less successful; the organizers of the dramatic circle were glad to allot parts to me, and I frequently featured in school performances and concerts. The result of all this was that instead of joining the biological faculty, once my dearest wish, I began to specialize in the history of the theatre. But after two years of study I realized that it was not theoretical investigation, but creative work which interested me. It was too early to begin writing—I knew nothing of people or life. Moreover I was drawn to laboratory studies, to books on biology, and I decided to switch over to the biological faculty. In the meantime I had got married, a daughter was born, and then a son. I was a student at the university, my husband studied at the Institute of Literature; we both received stipends. And then the Great Patriotic War began....

I evacuated with my children, but not for long. In September 1942 I returned to Moscow and joined the editing staff of

Pionerskaya Pravda. I found this work very hard at first, being entirely without experience, and a newspaper for children demands conciseness, a simple, expressive style. Here I realized for the first time the meaning of work on the choice of words, composition, the ability of picking out what is most important, of finding vivid images. There was an interesting circle organized at the editorial office in which youthful poets and authors from among our readers tried their hand at literary work. Some of them pursued this path later on in life, and every now and then I come across some young poet who, it turns out, brought his first verses to me, written at the age of ten or eleven.

During the war Soviet children did much to help their elders, and our paper was the promulgator and advocate of a great number of child activities. One of these splendid patriotic child efforts was the "Timur Movement", originating in the fine book *Timur and his Squad* of Arkadi Gaidar, a writer who was killed in the war. The Young Pioneers visited hospitals, read to the soldiers, wrote letters home for them, gave concerts. They did what they could to help the mothers and wives of those who were away at the front—looking after the housekeeping and the children, chopping wood, bringing water, working in vegetable plots.

The readers of our paper were an insatiable lot, and every morning the lift brought sacks of mail to our floor. Here were poems, stories, reports of metal-scrap collecting, and the gathering of medicinal herbs, information as to the discovery of ores, and endless inquiries, from questions about the international situation, scientific and technical questions, to such artful questions as, "Are grandmothers ever wrong?" Having prepared the day's issue, we started on the mail, ransacking books of reference, consulting scientists, engineers, and doctors.

Sometimes, after taking our children from the nursery school, which was in the same building as our editorial office, we had no time to take them home, and our babies were put to bed on the broad sofas of the editor's office. Very soon, however, the nursery school stayed open all night, and we only took our children home for the week-end.

We had no anxieties about the children. The nursery was staffed with experienced women, who, in addition to looking after our children devotedly, kept us informed of all the details of their life. We could always see our children when our work permitted, take them for walks, present them with a carefully saved sweet, sympathize with their interests. Also attached to the paper were a fine restaurant, a shop, an advance-order bureau, a hairdresser's, a clinic where we received free medical care, and a club.

It was undoubtedly these conditions which enabled me to combine the arduous job of manager of a section of the newspaper with writing. I began writing regularly from the year 1943, and several of my essays and stories were published in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. Soon after this I joined the staff of this paper as a travelling correspondent.

There was much interest for me in my journeys about the country, and the continual meetings with strangers. But I was anxious to complete the university. And after the war, when things began to settle down, I went back to the biological faculty, where many former fellow-students were now already teaching. For two years I kept the vow I had taken not to write—only to study—but in the third year I could no longer hold out. These were turbulent times in the world of biological science. The discussions between progressive scientists and the followers of Morgan, which absorbed us students too, could leave no one indifferent—certainly not a professional journalist. And it was this struggle for the victory of Michurinist biology that I wanted to show, in part at least, and to the extent of my ability, in my novel *Our Summer*. I started on this novel after the summer-practice period in the woods, amidst the singing of birds, and surrounded by our splendid young people. I worked on it about two years, and then, after its appearance in a magazine, took another year to prepare it for separate publication. The present translation has been made from this version.

Much factual material has been used in this novel, and Professor Manteufel, the scientific editor of the book, has verified the descriptions of bird and animal life down to the last detail, no less strictly than he used to do when I was a little girl. The authorities whom I consulted on bee-keeping, swine-breeding, and so on, were equally exacting. I tried, it is true, only to write about what I had intimate knowledge of. The work on the diet of frogs, the feeding of fledglings described in the book was all part of my student tasks. The daily notes kept by Shura as to the fox-cubs come from a genuine diary left by a scientific brigade of which I was a member at the age of thirteen. I thus felt entitled to include it in my book without the slightest alteration of entries that were always enthusiastic, if not always grammatical.

While working on my book I was in close touch with students, reading separate chapters to them, and availing myself now and then of their suggestions.

The discussions of my book held in various institutes, libraries and reading-rooms were a great help to me. I still get many letters from readers, giving me their impressions, pointing out defects,

telling me that my book has helped them in the selection of a profession, or the solution of their private problems.

I am often asked whether my characters are based on real people. I cannot say that any of them are portraits. But there can be no denying that the idea of Nikita came to me while on a professional visit to the Chuvash Autonomous Republic which, before the October Revolution, was one of the remotest and darkest spots in Russia. Trachoma raged there, there were no railways, no schools. But when I went there, there were medical posts in the tiniest hamlets, and the diseases which were once so devastating have been practically stamped out. Schools have been built everywhere. Russian words have long passed into the Chuvash language, which had no words for "school" or "teacher", for instance. Now all the children go to school. I met there with extremely interesting representatives of collective-farm youth, young agronomists and crop-experts, one of whom has since been given the title of Hero of Socialist Labour for record wheat crops. Evidently some of the characteristics of the latter made an impression on me, and later appeared in the person of Nikita Orekhov. It is also quite obvious that a certain collective-farm chairman, a most interesting individual and a splendid example for the young people, put the idea of the collective-farm chairman Zakhar Petrovich into my head.

I do not know to what extent I have succeeded in carrying out my ideas. It is not for me to judge of this. But the fact that young people are reading, discussing, and arguing about my book is a reward in itself. It has already gone through several editions, and been broadcast in dialogue form. And the play made from it, under the title *Our Summer*, was a great joy to me. Students from the biological faculty dramatized the book themselves, and acted in it in the university club. Being true naturalists they could not resist a certain "naturalism", and live frogs hopped about the stage, which was adorned with birches and firs felled on the very biological station described in the book. An interesting feature of the performance was the fact that the parts were distributed not according to histrionic ability, since many had never acted before, but in consideration of the likeness of the student-actors to the characters in the book. The performance was animated, sincere, enthusiastic, the students introducing a number of their own songs and quips, and it gave me intense pleasure to see the annihilation of the border-lines separating real people from my characters.

This is all I have to say about *Our Summer*. This year a play

about domestic life and love, entitled *Your Private Affair*, is being performed in more than a hundred theatres all over the country. I wrote it in collaboration with my husband, Lev Oshanin, poet and Stalin Prize winner. We are now working together again on a film about young people. While this sort of work is of absorbing interest to me, I fully intend to return to my favourite characters—Nikita, Varya, Lopatin—whom I shall take through some more years of their bright, wonderful lives.

YELENA USPENSKAYA

Moscow

January, 1954



OUR SUMMER

TO THE MEMORY
OF MY FATHER,
BORIS GLEBOVICH USPENSKY



CHAPTER I

The first to wake was the cuckoo. As if still husky with sleep it uttered an indistinct "coo-coo...." Then it paused, evidently busy preening its feathers, and at last came out with a wide-awake: "coo-coo!", after which it fell silent once more. Probably it had flown off to get its breakfast. Then a robin sang right over Varya's head.

Narrowing her eyes the way she imagined experienced biologists did, Varya had a good look at the nest. It hung from the branch of a small fir-tree, and was clearly visible. It must be very quiet, warm and drowsy inside... like a room where children are asleep.

That's what her room had been like long ago, before the war: the curtain drawn, the blanket tucked under her back to prevent draughts, the sound of Mother's breathing nearby....

Varya gave a little shiver. It was chilly in the wood as yet, and her feet in the dew-soaked gym-shoes were cold.

It had all turned out just as she and her mother had dreamed it would. Here was Varya—a second-year student of zoology, doing summer practice in a bird-sanctuary. On observation duty at a blackcap's nest from 3 to 5 in the small hours.

"Please be punctual," Professor Lopatin had said the day before.

Varya had not closed her eyes all night for fear of being late. And now she was on duty. Three in the morning. Cold. And blackcaps still asleep. How cosy it must be in the nest, with its smell of warm feathers! But she did not think much of the nest itself. There was nothing solid about it: loose and flat, made of dry grass with a few horsehairs woven into it. It might be all right while the fledglings were young, but when they grew up there would be danger of their falling out.

A slight rustle came from the nest. Varya pricked up her ears, narrowing her eyes again. And then all at once she realized she was not a bit like a real biologist.

"Look at yourself from the outside, Varya!" Agrippina Sergeyevna, the teacher in the children's home where Varya had been sent after her mother's death, used to say. And Varya had gradually learned to look at herself "from the outside." She had found it a great help in life.

Only a minute earlier she had seen herself as an experienced naturalist, a valiant individual seated in a skilfully concealed "blind", one whose whole life was devoted to science, who had not slept all night and was carrying out scientific research of the utmost importance.

But when she saw herself from the outside, it appeared that the blind was so badly made she would get wet through if it rained, and that the girl inside it was cold and sleepy and hardly knew anything yet.

Listen to the cry of that bird now. What bird was it? She had not the faintest idea, although Professor Lopatin had just spent a whole day in the woods with them. And in two weeks there would be the zoology exam, and they would be asked to identify bird calls.

A toad plopped down heavily at Varya's feet. It looked defiantly at her out of a bulging eye, as if to say, "Can you state what species I belong to, Miss? *Ridibunda* or

Temporaria? Or am I perhaps the common run of toad?
Eh?"

The toad looked sated and complacent after the night's hunt, but Varya could not make out its species.

A branch swayed above the nest. The blackcap flew out, alighting on the very top of a birch-tree.

"Oh, dear, I nearly missed it!" thought Varya.

The cock-bird followed the hen. The cock was the one with the black cap, the female wore a brown one. Or was it the other way round? One must not mix them up. No, it was the cock that wore the black cap. Here's the mother coming again.

The bird hopped down from bough to bough of the young fir as if they were steps. Then, looking back cautiously and turning its head from right to left, it dropped into the nest.

Three beaks shot up to greet her—big yellow beaks, diamond-shaped when they opened. Necks, trembling with the strain, craned upwards supporting the beaks. The mother-bird thrust a worm into one, hesitated a moment and soared upwards. The father immediately swooped down to the nest and once more, like flowers on slender stalks, the eager yellow beaks blossomed out.

Varya glanced at her watch—it was one minute past four. A red pencil-stroke for the mother's arrival, a blue one for the father's. Two visits, three, eight, ten....

Four-fifty: mother, 15 trips; father, 11. Men are selfish. Probably had a couple of worms himself, and the mother goes hungry.

Twenty-eight visits, thirty. The blackcaps were carrying white lumps out of the nest. Cleaning up, most likely.... How can one watcher be expected to take it all in? It would have been ever so much easier if there had been two. But apparently there's no waking Alla at half past two in the morning.

Forty-two, forty-three....

Members of the Komsomol don't behave like that. If you're appointed for duty, be so kind as to be present. I'll raise the question before the Komsomol group; you'll see if I don't, Alla Alexandrovna....

Sixty, seventy....

Varya lost count of the numbers but kept her tally. A blue stroke, another, a red stroke, a red stroke. Make the strokes neatly now so that you can count them afterwards. A stroke... another... another....

At last the blackcaps' activity subsided and Varya could brush a wisp of hair from her forehead and unbutton the neck of her sweater. It was morning—bustling and warm.

The same mysterious bird called again. Try as she might, Varya could not make out what bird it was. Where could it be? Somewhere far away, by the stream. It called at long intervals. And now in the many-voiced choir it was quite impossible to distinguish one bird from another.

The finch was the last to wake up. It rushed headlong into song and then stopped short, leaving it, as usual, unfinished.

At first all the students were glad when they heard the finch. Its song was characteristic, and there were two vivid white stripes on its wing. Anyone would get a top mark if asked to describe the finch at the exam. But very soon it appeared that the finch was a nuisance. It sang without stopping and made it impossible to distinguish the voices of other birds.

There was movement in the bushes and Yura Dozhdkov's head appeared. Nikita Orekhov crawled out of the bushes after him.

The elusive bird called again.

"What bird was that?" Varya asked in a whisper.

Yuna made a grave face and listened.

"Moscow titmouse, the cock-bird..." he decided.

How sure of himself he was! But Nikita, looking at him out of the corner of his eye, said:

"No, that was the nightingale."

"What? The nightingale?"

Despite her confidence in Nikita, who had grown up in a kolkhoz, among the woods, Varya could not help doubting him this time. She had read so many descriptions of the nightingale's song, and what she heard now was nothing but a hoarse cackle.

"He only sings well when he's courting," explained Nikita. "This isn't a song at all. It's an alarm. Something's wrong near his nest. He's anxious."

"Where's his nest?" asked Yura, who was never upset by defeat. "If it's a nightingale, it's a nightingale. What of it?"

"I won't tell you," Nikita answered. "If you go on collecting eggs there won't be any baby nightingales this year. And they ought to be hatching out any day now."

Nikita gazed about anxiously as if looking for someone.

"Alla overslept," Varya announced with ill-concealed triumph.

"I wasn't thinking of her," Nikita answered, reddening.

"She wouldn't have stood the cold, anyhow," Varya added and then stopped short. Easy, Varya, look at yourself from the outside!

"Take over the watch," she said icily, getting out of the blind.

The camp was still asleep when Varya returned from the woods and sat down under a pine-tree near the girls' house.

"This whole house would go into the kitchen of our country cottage, and yet six of us are to live in it," Alla

had remarked on their first day at the biological station. Alla Irtishova had come after everybody else. Her mother had brought her in a gleaming black car of the latest Soviet model. "Glorious car!" Zina Rizhikova had whispered ecstatically.

At the time Varya had not been able to understand Alla's dissatisfaction. And she still could not understand it. She cast an admiring glance at the little house. At that early hour it looked new and clean in the sunlight, with its big windows and high, slanting roof. Varya thought it very nice inside, too. Of course they could never have made it so comfortable but for Vera Vasilievna.

Scarcely an hour after her arrival, the little room assigned to Vera Vasilievna looked as if she had been living there all her life. It was no makeshift, but a real home, cosy, comfortable, with a lived-in look. There were photographs on the walls, books on shelves, an attractive paper lamp-shade, a small mirror, flowers in a jar, and a dainty embroidered curtain on the window which left Lyuba, who knew something about embroidery, breathless with admiration. After this the girls' room seemed bare and cheerless and much too big. So that Lyuba, with whom to think was to act, sighed wistfully, and exclaimed:

"If only we had a hammer, girls!"

"Here you are!"

A hand passed a hammer to them through the door of the little room.

In the same way appeared nails, drawing-pins, pliers, glue, ink, butter muslin, string, reels of cotton (both black and white), a hook for picking up runs in stockings, and waxed paper with which Marina made a wonderful lamp-shade. The extraordinary part of it was that Vera Vasilievna had brought with her a suit-case and rucksack no bigger than those brought by the students. But it was Vera Vasilievna herself who astonished the girls most of

all. There were two Vera Vasilievnas, it appeared. One, the Vera Vasilievna they had known at the university, instructor in practical zoology, a smallish woman with her hair brushed smoothly off her forehead, caustic-tongued, inexorable at exams. The other Vera Vasilievna was this one they had found seated at the window in a gay-patterned house dress, her head, with its two short, fluffy plaits, bent over an embroidery-frame. Every now and then she glanced out of the window. It was getting dark, and her twelve-year-old son Boris, whom she had brought with her to the biological station, was not back yet. As soon as they arrived she had sent him to the woods to look for nests suitable for observation. Boris had set out bursting with pride in his work and casting patronizing glances at the students. It was his second summer at the biological station, and he had at his finger-tips all that they had yet to learn.

Varya liked Boris—a skinny lad with mischievous eyes and lashes of incredible length and beauty. These lashes made him the target of innumerable insulting epithets, such as "sissy" and "mother's darling", and he was always having to avenge these insults by fighting.

Vera Vasilievna communicated her fears to Varya. The prolonged absence of her son made her think that he was not so much looking for nests as establishing relations with boys from one of the neighbouring collective farms. Relations with those of The Streams Kolkhoz, which was the nearest to the biological station, had been established the previous summer. Boris had had quite a time of it, since the boys at The Streams were good fighters. But he had at last forced them to forget about his eye-lashes, and had won for himself the proud title of "centre forward".

It was quite dark out and lights were switched on indoors when Boris appeared on the threshold of the small room.

"Get the iodine," Vera Vasilievna said briefly the moment her eyes fell on him.

The boy went to the wall medicine-chest in the corner; the girls stood silently in the doorway.

Boris gave the bottle of iodine to his mother and held out his wounded knee, biting his lip in advance.

"Here, too," said Boris, thrusting out a scratched elbow.

"Well, have you made friends?" asked Vera Vasilievna, trying to suppress a smile as she bandaged the knee with experienced hands.

With a shake of his head Boris told her tersely that he had found six nests that would do, and on his way home had met two boys catapulting an owl. He had explained to them that owls were useful birds, but they would not listen to him.

"So what did you do?" asked Lyuba, unable to restrain herself.

"I rammed into them."

All awaited the development of the story, but Boris said no more.

"What about the owl?" asked Marina.

"The owl flew away," answered Boris, lowering his lashes, and a deceptively innocent look came over his face.

Varya thought more of him than ever for having struggled so bravely in the cause of science. One day she would have a son exactly like him. But the sight of his bandaged knee and scratched face had served as a damp on the festive mood of the first day of summer practice. Yet they were in for something worse.

Fyodor Fyodorovich Lopatin, the zoology professor, visited the girls in the evening of their first day in the woods. During examinations on vertebrates the second-year students had become finally convinced that they need not fear anything from Professor Lopatin. True,

there was no deceiving him. But anyone who really knew the subject and was merely unable to get the better of nervousness, could always count on him for help.

Professor Lopatin, however, had arrived in a very bad temper that evening. Much to Varya's astonishment, Lyuba did not seem to notice this. She boasted of the curtains, and invited him to have supper with them. It was to be quite a feast; they had laid the table with burdock-leaves, and each girl placed on them the food she had brought from home. But Fyodor Fyodorovich eyed the table, the newly-washed floor and the lamp-shade disapprovingly.

"Nice and cosy, aren't you?" he growled. "And no thought for your comrades," he added as he stepped into the small room.

"Can you let me have some candles, Vena Vasilieva?" he asked.

"How many?"

"Six will do to begin with. The boys' hut is simply a hole—a burrow. Not even a light in it. As a matter of fact a well-made burrow is much more comfortable. The animals build them with love and care. But that hut must have been made by a selfish blockhead. It's cold, and, worse still, it's dark." He left, taking the candles with him.

"Rizhikova!" cried the ever-active Lyuba, Komsomol Organizer of second-year students. "Hurry up with your supper and then write out a notice: 'To-morrow, 3 p.m., Komsomol Meeting. Agenda: Improvement of Students' Living Conditions. Attendance Compulsory'."

Varya had slipped out unobserved and followed Fyodor Fyodorovich. She was ashamed now of the white curtains and the coat-hangers. And she no longer felt an appetite for supper. Why wait for the meeting? Why not simply go and help? When she reached the boys' hut she saw Nikita Orekhov standing near the door. He seemed

to look through her, as though she were a leafless bush. Tightening her grasp on the hammer and nails with which she had intended to improve the boys' living quarters, Varya darted back towards the girls' house. If they don't even want to say "how-do-you-do" to us, let them shift for themselves! They don't need us? Very well. They can wait for the meeting then. *She* had no desire to thrust herself on people! Even now, as she remembered how she had rushed back to their little house, she blushed crimson. And the nails had been so sharp against her palm!

No meeting, however, was held on the following day, for Fyodor Fyodorovich took them all so far into the woods that they got back only just in time for supper. And in the evening he and Vera Vasilievna worked out a schedule for nest-watching. Everybody wanted to be on night duty. Everyone, that is, but Alla, who said nothing. She sat apart in a very long flamboyant dressing-gown. She was always bored in the woods at night. And besides, she was annoyed with Professor Lopatin for having made them go the hardest way—on purpose of course—now uphill, now through open country in the heat. She had known how it would be the moment she heard him say to Vera Vasilievna: "I think we might leave the path and go straight ahead, through the fir-grove. It is a bit dense, but never mind, we'll scramble through somehow." And he had nodded, with a mischievous look at Alla's high-heeled shoes. And here was Fyodor Fyodorovich at it again, wagging his beard in the direction of the flamboyant dressing-gown:

"You'll be on duty, young lady, and you too, Varya. The object of observation will be a blackcap's nest."

And he had shot another sidelong glance at the dressing-gown. When the girls were alone, Lyuba, inexorable as ever, had asked:

"Well—do you intend to go? Or will you stay at home and nurse your health?"

"I'll go," Alla had replied.

But when Varya waked her, Alla said: "You go, I'll catch you up." She even started dressing, but she never came to the nest. She must have gone to sleep again.

... Now as Varya lay on the grass, she reproached herself. She ought to have waited for Alla of course. She was Komsomol Organizer for their group—if *she* did not see that discipline was maintained, who would? And Lyuba would be sure to call a Komsomol meeting and raise the question of "absenteeism". Perhaps Varya could manage to take the blame upon herself? There was not much chance of doing that, though. Lyuba would look into her eyes and say:

"Why are you shielding her? Better not try to lie, Varya, you know you're no good at it." And then she would add severely: "We've got to stick to principles. You're much too indulgent."

"You're in for it, Comrade Komsomol Organizer!" thought Varya bitterly.

Already the woods had begun to smell of resin and Varya felt that, despite her anxious thoughts, she was on the verge of falling asleep. But it was not worth while—in an hour's time the camp would be up. True, Vera Vasilievna had said that those who went on night duty could get up later. But what sort of Komsomol Organizer came late on the very first day? Scrambling to her feet, Varya shook off her languor, rubbed her fists into her eyes, and decided to go and have a bathe.

Fyodor Fyodorovich was sitting motionless in the vine, leaning against a thick, moss-grown birch. His grizzled hair and beard blended with the moss covering the tree-trunk, and he himself seemed part of the tree. Hearing Varya's steps, he turned a ferocious glance on her, which meant, "Quiet!" During their first walk through

the woods with Fyodor Fyodorovich he had stopped on a narrow path leading into the dark green depths and said: "Quiet! Now all eyes and ears! Look! Listen! Think! For the time being we will only watch. Later on we shall act."

And the awed students had followed him along the narrow path, stepping over the springy moss, trying to avoid twigs so as not to frighten away the mysterious forest life that was all around them, though as yet incomprehensible to most of them.

This morning Varya stood stock-still on catching sight of Fyodor Fyodorovich. He was craning up at a small fir-tree. From a branch hung a little bag, ingeniously made of ferns. While Varya racked her brains trying to remember whose nest it was, a tiny chestnut-coloured bird flew out of it. A straight, narrow tail stood upright, lending the bird an independent, even cheeky air. It gave a few chirps and took wing. Following it with her eyes, Varya at last dared to take a step forward and sat down beside Fyodor Fyodorovich.

"Fine fellow, eh?" he said in a pleased whisper as he picked the twigs and cobwebs out of his beard. He must have been roaming the woods for hours. It was altogether a mystery when that man slept. Probably never.

"Do you know what bird it is? A male wren. He's built himself bachelor quarters, you see. He can't bear his wife's nest, with its squabbling and cooking and soiled nappies. The moment children put in an appearance he takes refuge in a bachelor nest. Clever fellow, eh?"

"You're always joking. But why does he really make a bachelor nest?"

"Why? Where? How? When?" said Fyodor Fyodorovich teasingly. He liked people to ask questions.

The wren hopped about in the branches of the fir, casting suspicious glances at them. Tilting up its tail, which made it look still shorter and more arrogant, and throwing back its head, it began to sing. It was a sweet ring-

ing song—a high-pitched trill ending in a crackling sound. Having rung it over about a dozen times, the wren plunged into the bushes with a business-like air. Fyodor Fyodorovich looked after it approvingly.

"Why a second nest? Think it out for yourself."

Varya looked questioningly at him.

"You saw what sort of a bird it is?"

"Very small."

"Exactly. It's the smallest bird in our forests. Of tropical origin. Made its home here. A delicate bird. Body fragile, feathers sparse. Both parents sit on the eggs. The nest is small. When the cock-bird relieves the hen, there's nowhere for her to go, and when she sits on the eggs at night, there's no place for *him*. Any other bird would perch itself on a bough and sleep. But this one cannot stand the cold. So it builds itself another house. Warm and snug. Charming bird, highly intelligent, too."

Looking at Fyodor Fyodorovich one might think it was he who had invented the wren's ingenious way of life and had built the bachelor villa for it with his own hands. He talked of the bird in such a way as to leave no doubt that the world held no bird more charming than the wren.

But Varya felt the same towards any creature Professor Lopatin talked about. Of course, some animals and birds were man's enemies, but that did not make them less interesting. Any one of them deserved to be studied for long years.

"And how are our friends the blackcaps?" asked Lopatin.

Although she was bursting with impressions about the blackcaps, Varya tried to talk with calm precision.

Fyodor Fyodorovich studied her from beneath his shaggy white eyebrows.

"Where do they go for food?"

"To the tree-tops."

"Did you have a good look at the fledglings?"

"Only from a distance."

"Why? Study one thoroughly, see if you can find any signs of similarity to the reptiles. Make a drawing of it. Take it out of its nest, weigh it. Investigate."

"Professor Sharov told us not to touch them," said Varya timidly. "He says we might frighten them away. He says our task is observation."

Fyodor Fyodorovich was silent. Varya realized she had said the wrong thing.

"Run along now, and get into bed," he said in a voice which was glum, but by no means unkindly.

"I'm going for a bathe," said Varya in a subdued voice. A fine observer! Couldn't answer a single question properly. Just drew strokes on paper. Like a schoolgirl.

"Never mind, Varya—you'll make a good biologist one day."

Varya looked at Fyodor Fyodorovich starry-eyed. One day she would be like him: old and sage, with piercing eyes, the forest her element. And then she'd say to some girl student: "You'll be a good biologist one day," and make her the happiest person in the world.

She would have liked to go on talking to Fyodor Fyodorovich, but it was obvious that he was not disposed to talk.

"Run along now, I have a little job to do here."

Rising, he picked up a strange object which Varya at once saw to be a slightly modified bicycle pump. Fyodor Fyodorovich walked away with a parting smile, waving the pump.

CHAPTER 2

For a long time after Varya had left the blind, Nikita fidgeted about trying to settle down comfortably. It was quite a job, for there seemed to be no room for his legs. Yura was lanky, too, and kept turning restlessly, every

now and then sticking a bony shoulder, a knee, or an elbow into Nikita. Even when he lay still, Nikita was kept in constant expectation of being butted into by Yura, or, still worse, of being talked to by him. This last apprehension was justified, for they had hardly settled down when Yura stretched himself and chuckled, to give Nikita to understand that the story which he was about to tell was an amusing one. But Nikita said hurriedly: "Please don't talk; I want to think," and drew a stroke in his notebook.

Yura heaved a sigh of disappointment, looked round the blind, and then, suddenly feeling romantic, began composing poetry. "The twigs cast shadows on your pallid cheeks . . ." he whispered, wrinkling his sunburnt nose. He wrote blank verse—rhymes evaded him—and he sang exclusively of love. The lines he was now composing were addressed to Lyuba, whose constant admirer he had been these three months. Yura had an easy and agreeable style of love-making. He took his girl-of-the-moment to the cinema, carried her brief-case for her, and saw her home every night. On the way he told amusing stories or, stopping all of a sudden and clutching his companion's sleeve so as to make escape impossible, he intoned one of his poems. If the girl happened to be sentimental, she liked the verses. Sometimes he was even asked to write down the successful "improvisations".

"I can't waste my time on such trifles," he would answer carelessly. "This is a mere transient gift. Nine out of every ten men write poetry between the ages of sixteen and twenty." He did not mean it, though. It was just that the verses written down did not seem so good to him—he felt more work would have to be put into them, and he was too lazy to work.

Yura's love-affairs usually ended in the following way: the girl, having grown used to him and become convinced of his sterling qualities, would, in a weak moment engen-

dered by his poetry, confide to him her unrequited love for another boy. That was only natural, for if her love had been requited, it would not have been Yura with whom she would have spent her leisure hours and gone to the cinema. And so Yura would switch immediately from the role of lover to that of big brother, consoling the girl and giving her good advice. And from then on their relationship would be that of eternal friendship, linked by the bitter-sweet secret which they shared.

When it became known that the otherwise garrulous Yuna never divulged other people's love-secrets, the confidences started flowing after the second or third rendezvous.

On their first evening together, as they walked from the cinema, Lyuba said in a cheerful voice: "Don't read poetry to me, Yura. For one thing, I don't understand poetry, and for another, I've been crossed in love."

But Yura knew only too well how people talk when they are crossed in love—and he went on seeing the girl home every night with a constancy which astonished himself.

The verses about the pallid cheeks developed slowly. Yuna was distracted by the cock-bird, which had become inordinately active, turning up continually at the nest. Nikita, too, prevented him from concentrating. Yura could guess what he was thinking about.

Yura was conscious that a fit of seriousness was coming over him, and that was what he could not endure. Seriousness was to him what a bad headache was to others—a throbbing at the temples, a sinking sensation in the pit of the stomach, and a feeling that he must at all costs have a change. That was how he felt now. He longed for the serious mood to pass, but it would not.

Besides the love-secrets entrusted to Yura was one which had not exactly been entrusted to him. He had divined it by chance in the winter. The students had been

doing practical work on vertebrates and Yura's eyes, wearied with the study of the crocodile's skull, which had in his opinion far too many bones, roved absently over the laboratory until they lighted upon Varya Berezhkova. Something she saw was causing her pain. She was looking at Nikita, who was explaining to Alla the structure of a snake's skull. Although Nikita was looking down at her, he seemed to be looking right into her eyes. Yura became thoughtful and leaned his elbow on the crocodile's skull, breaking its lower jaw. Vera Vasilievna grew angry.

"Our last decent crocodile! And they're so hard to get!" she cried indignantly. And to punish Yura she gave him the tiniest lizard-skull, pencilled all over in different colours, so that it was quite impossible to distinguish one bone from another. For a long time Yura was haunted by the memory of Varya's pensive little face, and one evening, in the green dusk of the reading-room, he did some reconnoitring:

"Some rather nice girls in our university, don't you think?" he asked Nikita.

"Yes, some of them are not bad," was the languid reply.

"Varya, for instance...."

"Varya?" Nikita puckered his brow. "Which is she? The dark one?"

"The fair one," Yura answered, realizing at once the hopelessness of the situation.

And now, crouching beside Nikita in the leafy blind, Yura found himself thinking again of Varya, Nikita and Alla.

Nikita had said: "Don't talk!" but why shouldn't he? A blind in the woods—it was just the right setting. Here was he, anxious to warn a friend about his mistake, eager to defend the happiness of a deserving girl. And must he keep silent because Nikita wanted to think?

Nikita the Mysterious! As if everyone did not know that all Nikita's thoughts were centred on Alla.

As it happened, Nikita was not thinking of Alla. He was thinking of his father. That did not mean he had forgotten Alla at the moment. She was woven so closely into his life, his work, his dreams of the future, that she was ever present, ever by his side. Even his thoughts about his father were bound up with thoughts of her, and that in the most direct sense of the word.

Some time ago Nikita had written to his father, and he was now trying to imagine what the answer would be. Nikita had asked permission to marry Alla. Ivan Trifonovich Orekhov, Nikita's father, was an austere, taciturn man. Nikita's aunt told him his father had once been jovial, fond of singing, and the best dancer in the village. Nikita's mother had been a beautiful woman, but Nikita had never seen her; she had died in giving birth to him. After her death his father left the village in Siberia where he was born, fleeing from the house, grown desolate all at once, and from the sympathetic looks of the neighbours. He had settled down in a remote, peaceful little Chuvash village buried in silver willows, where his married sister lived.

Nikita's father was a smith, but when tractors and other agricultural machines appeared in ever-increasing numbers on their kolkhoz, he had acquired great skill as a mechanician.

When Nikita left the seven-year school, his father sent him to a ten-year school at a big kolkhoz, some five kilometres from their village, and Nikita lodged with the teacher, Maria Vasilievna.

Nikita liked living at Maria Vasilievna's. He read a great deal, helped her with the housework and went to see his father on Sundays. During one of those visits, Nikita noticed that his father had grown perceptibly thinner. He was helping build a power station for the kolkhoz,

and perhaps the work was too strenuous for man of his age.

That night after Nikita had gone to bed, his father came and sat by him. Thinking Nikita was asleep, he passed his hand ever so lightly over his hair, and Nikita heard him say quietly to himself: "Sonny". Nikita had difficulty holding back his tears. He didn't remember when he had last cried, and what it had felt like. He only knew it was not to be thought of, and so he lay quietly, trying not even to breathe. At last his father went to bed, where he tossed, turned and smoked. And Nikita lay sleepless, listening to his father striking match after match.

After school next day, Nikita told Maria Vasilievna that he was going to live at home. He shouldered his small trunk and bade her good-bye.

A blizzard was in full blast. Walking along the village street was easy enough, but when he reached open country his feet sank into the snow and the wind seemed to go right through him. He was tired out and chilled through.

He found the key hanging in its usual place—his father had not yet come home from work. The stove had not been heated that day, and the windows were covered with frost. On the table there was a plate of cold potatoes.

Nikita heated the stove, swept the room and made the dinner. He hurried through it all, hoping to have everything ready by the time his father came back. He wanted to see his father smile as he came in. But when his father did come in, he looked anxiously at Nikita.

"Are you ill?"

"No. I want to live at home."

"What about school?"

"I can walk, can't I? A little walk won't do me any harm. Let's have dinner."

After dinner Nikita sat down to his home-work. His father sat opposite with a paper, every now and then steal-

ing a glance over his spectacles at his son. Nikita was conscious of those glances. It was warm, light, and quiet in the room. Before going to bed, Nikita's father went out to have a wash, and suddenly he began singing an old song. As Nikita listened to the quavering voice, so unexpectedly high-pitched, he knew it would be no hardship for him to get up the next day before dawn and run across the white fields to school.

Nikita peered at Yura out of the corner of his eye. He felt a sudden longing to talk about his father. But Yura's abstracted gaze and the discovery that Yura had missed the arrival of the blackcap, drove away any such desire.

Nikita's father had dreamed of making an engineer of him, but did not insist, and allowed him to take up biology. Before leaving, Nikita had prevailed upon his father to invite one of his nieces, a high-spirited but good-natured and practical girl, to come and keep house for him. But he was half-afraid that the obstinate old man might by this time have sent the girl packing, and might be alone in the cold, empty house, pining for his son.

He would have to graduate as quickly as possible and go back to his father. But ever since Nikita had decided to marry Alla, an element of uncertainty had begun to tinge his dreams. Where would they live? Would Alla look after his father properly? How would it all turn out?

Despite the sense of insecurity in their relations, he grew daily more in love. He thought Alla beautiful, intelligent, well-read, kind-hearted and cheerful. True, her parents had spoiled her; that was why she did not appeal to people he felt a great respect for, like Gromada, Marina, Stepan and Lyuba.

But what worried Nikita most of all was that Fyodor Fyodorovich did not approve of Alla. That meant his father might not like her. Nikita had been much upset by Alla's sleeping through her watch. There would have to be another of those talks between them which Alla called "the taming of the shrew". Such scenes always ended in Nikita's begging forgiveness for his "harshness", even though in the depth of his heart he knew he was right.

At such moments he hated himself. The calm, sane individual whom Nikita had considered himself to be gave way to a timid ditherer who feared a quarrel above everything in the world.

Nikita fidgeted. His foot had gone to sleep. Yura could restrain himself no longer. "I suppose you couldn't make me understand the meaning of these watches, and of these blue and red lines we have to make?" he burst out.

Nikita had an uncanny gift of silence. Yura felt as if he were knocking at a securely locked door. But he had made up his mind; he would get an answer this time.

Nikita patiently repeated all Vera Vasilievna had said the day before. It was of great importance to know what quantity of what insects a given species of bird devours in a day. To know whether the bird in question was useful or harmful....

"What for?" asked Yura, to whom any conversation was better than none.

Nikita explained in detail all that had escaped Yura's attention at lectures. But just as he was warming up to his subject Yuna plunged his hand into the side pocket of Nikita's coat, drew out a watch by its chain, sighed heavily, and let it drop back.

"Besides," said Nikita, thrusting the watch deeper into his pocket, "watching teaches us patience and observation."

"It only teaches *me* impatience," returned Yura, looking at the nest with something very like irritation. He was wondering if he could not slip away. But even if Vera Vasilievna did not check the watch, she would be sure to guess that he had left before the end. Yura had already had experience of her astuteness during their winter studies of the zoology of vertebrates. If he had so much as glanced at the clock, Vera Vasilievna had told him obligingly: "Yes, you'll have to suffer thirteen minutes more, Dozhdikov." So Yura made up his mind to stay where he was, and it was a good thing he did, for just then Vera Vasilievna appeared in the pathway.

Her attention was riveted on the tree-tops. The day before she had noticed a finch's nest on one of the tall birches, and now she wanted to find it. Boris followed in his mother's wake, copying her every movement. Vera Vasilievna looked up, and Boris did too, she stopped over some tracks in the path, and Boris did too.

"Come and join us!" Yura cried in a sudden access of hospitality.

The blackcap flew into the nest, displaying its little black-capped head.

"Which is it, Dozhdikov?" demanded Vera Vasilievna.

"The hen," Yura answered confidently.

Nikita gasped.

"The hen, is it?" said Vera Vasilievna coolly. "What's that white stuff it's carrying in its beak?"

Boris hissed the answer, but Yura could not hear him and remained silent.

"Don't you know either, Orekhov?"

"It's the cock clearing the nest," Nikita answered dully.

"Couldn't you be more explicit?" insisted Vera Vasilievna.

"He has taken out a capsule. All fledglings produce such capsules. Fledglings' excrements are enveloped in

a membrane. The parents take the capsules from the nest. The membrane is strong and transparent, rather like gelatine."

"It's like the castor oil 'grapes' they sell at the chemists', isn't it, Mamma?" Boris interrupted.

"Is it true you have found a nest of the song-thrush?" asked Nikita, hoping by changing the subject to avert the storm which threatened to break over Yura's head.

"Yes, Marina Dimkova is going to work on it; she has chosen the development of fledglings as her theme for this year. Would you care to see the nest?"

"Is it the one in the fir-grove, to the right?" asked Nikita modestly.

"Have you seen it?" asked Vera Vasilievna, a note of annoyance creeping into her voice.

Her annoyance was increased by the fact that Fyodor Fyodorovich, who had stolen up on noiseless feet as his wont was, was standing only a few paces away, nonchalantly swinging his bicycle pump. Ever since her student days Vera Vasilievna had been famed for her talent for spotting birds' nests. But lately she had not been able to discover a single one not already found by Nikita Oreshkov. Fyodor Fyodorovich would tease her again, and Boris looked as if he were ready to join in the teasing.

"And have you seen the nest of the spotted wood-pecker on the aspen, quite near our station?"

"No, I haven't."

"Aha!" Vera Vasilievna cast a severe look at Boris. "I'll make the rounds of the posts," she said to Fyodor Fyodorovich.

"Is all in order at this one?"

"No, only half is in order," Vera Vasilievna replied, turning into the woods.

Boris let her get a few yards ahead, winked at Yura and stood on his hands; he had obviously been on his good behaviour too long.

"Get on to your feet, Boris!" said Vera Vasilievna, her eyes still fixed on the top of a birch. "How many times must I tell you never to walk on your hands near nests?"

Reluctantly Boris returned to normal position. They could not leave a fellow alone, not even in the woods. Still, it was better than being at home. Boris had a hard time of it in Moscow. At home he was always hearing: "Don't shout, you're not out in the street!" and when he played in the street, people leaned out of the window and told him not to make such a noise, for he was not at home. What was a fellow to do?

Boris caught up with his mother, a somewhat triumphant smile on his lips, for he had just seen the very nest his mother was looking for; he decided, however, that the longer she looked for it, the more she would appreciate his powers of observation. It was only when they had passed the nest-bearing birch that Boris tugged at his mother's sleeve.

"There it is!" he cried.

"Ah, so you have found it at last," said Vera Vasilievna with a deprecating wave of her hand. "I noticed it long ago. And there's the tree Creeper—can you see it?"

The discomfited Boris began looking about for the bird.

Stepan Poroshin and Ivan Ostapovich Gromada approached the blind. Yura cheered up at the sight of Gromada, for his arrival meant the end of the watch. Ivan Ostapovich was Party Organizer for the year, and one had to watch one's step with him. Drawing himself up, Yura solemnly announced: "All present and correct!"

Ivan Ostapovich had come to the university straight from service in the navy.

"Carry on," he answered with equal solemnity.

With a sidelong glance at Lopatin, Yuna darted into the bushes. Who knows but he might give him some task, and then where would his chance of a bathe be?

Nikita's relief was Stepan, a taciturn Siberian hunter, who had managed to grow a copious black beard at the age of 23.

There was silence in the blind for some time. Stepan, Gromada and Fyodor Fyodorovich all sucked at their pipes, while Nikita made a drawing of the blackcap. The bird was perched calmly on a branch opposite the entrance to the blind, evidently grown quite used to the presence of man, its head slightly on one side, one wing unfolded in a gesture of weariness, displaying every feather in it. Then, tilting its body, it gathered in the wing, spread out another, and stretched itself. A metal ring gleamed on its scaly leg. The blackcap took wing.

"Did you notice the ring?" Fyodor Fyodorovich asked.

"Yes," answered Nikita, following the bird's flight with his eyes.

"It must be one of those we ringed last year. It was hatched here, and has come back."

"Yes, they always fly back to their old haunts," observed Nikita.

"That's just it," said Lopatin, rising and pacing in front of the blind. "And it does not suit us," he added, sitting down again. "We must change it."

"You can't make the birds understand that," said Stepan with a smile.

"We must." Fyodor Fyodorovich was perfectly serious. "We have to. Think of all the new orchards and parks we have planted! We must make the birds nest in the young woods. *Make them, I say.*"

"A troop-carrying operation," said Gromada, smiling.

"Precisely, Ivan Ostapovich. That was a happy expression of yours. We must transport troops of forest birds

to the defence of the new trees. And what troops! Look at this," he said, breaking off a twig and holding it out for the students to see.

On it was a large furry caterpillar striped black and orange like a tiger. Gromada touched it, and it fell. It was merely the shell of the caterpillar, and a hole had been pecked in its side.

"Whose work is this?" asked Fyodor Fyodorovich.

"The titmouse's," answered Nikita. "She's a crafty bird: she pulls the flesh out with her beak—she has a strong beak—and eats it. But she leaves the skin. These caterpillar hairs are of chitin—they're poisonous."

Stepan looked at Nikita with respect.

"Quite right," corroborated Fyodor Fyodorovich. "But the cuckoo isn't afraid of them, it swallows them whole. The lining of its alimentary tract is peculiarly thick: it can eat almost anything. Did you know that?"

"No," confessed Gromada.

"A pity I didn't ask you about it at the exams," Lopatin said with a smile.

"And so," he went on, rising to his feet again, "look around you: trees everywhere, and everywhere—among the leaves, upon the trunks, in the hollows, as well as in the grass—are their defenders. There's a warbler over there, its wings vibrating over that bough. It collects plant-lice from the tips of branches. It clears one branch after another. And the fly-catcher keeps watch on an outlying branch, and catches her prey in the air. What does the woodpecker save the tree from? From the ipidae. It has a long serrated tongue with which it penetrates the passages made by the ipidae and pierces the bodies of the insects, stringing them on its tongue, one after another. Nightingales and robins poke about the bushes and on the ground itself."

"So they're the sappers. All branches of the service represented," Gromada said, admiration in his voice.

"About 120 species of forest birds—that's what keeps this forest so beautiful. And then there's our Askaniya-Nova reservation; it's eighty years old, and still there are neither finches, thrushes, or chiff-chaff in it—how d'you like that? And the same thing is true of all our young plantations. And no wonder! The birds come back to their old homes, and these little pests," Fyodor Fyodorovich picked up the empty caterpillar and flung it away with an angry motion, "feast themselves upon the trees."

"What can be done about it?" asked Nikita.

"That's just the question we have to answer. We will go on experimenting. Last year, for instance, we transported birds' eggs."

"Well?"

"The birds hatched, and according to information received this year they have returned to the same place. But there were so few of them! And it's such a job to transport the eggs! They dry up, or become addled."

"And what about transporting fledglings, Fyodor Fyodorovich?" asked Gromada, suddenly enthusiastic.

"That's what we must try. There's a lot of things we must still try. Now listen, Comrades. Victor Belevsky, a fourth-year student, is coming to-morrow—know him?"

"Who doesn't know him?" smiled Gromada. "Lopatin's shadow—that's what we call him."

"That's splendid!" exclaimed Nikita. He had his own reasons for wanting to see Victor.

Gromada narrowed his eyes understandingly.

"Got stuck with your newspaper, eh, editor? Hoping for help?"

Nikita nodded his honest assent. As a matter of fact he was in a difficult position. He could draw very well and was always thinking of interesting items, but he could not write articles, although he had been on the editorial board of the newspaper for two whole years. And Victor had a rapid pen and liked writing. Nothing could

have been more timely. Nikita had not been able to collect articles for the first number of *The Biological Station*. He had actually sunk to asking Yura Dozhdikov for help, and received the business-like answer that he was like Pushkin in that his muse usually visited him in the autumn.

"I don't know about the paper—whether Victor will have time," said Lopatin. "He's coming here to do a special job."

"Victor always finds time for everything," put in Gromada. "And what's this job he's coming about? Tell us, Fyodor Fyodorovich."

"We mean to try carrying the fledglings and eggs short distances. Victor Belevsky's working on this problem. If you like, you can help too. First we'll see how it works here, at the biological station. Only remember—this work is not included in the plan, you'll have to do it in your spare time. Will that be all right?"

"Of course it will!" answered Gromada. "And he agrees, too," he added, nodding at Stepan.

"No waste of words between you," smiled Lopatin.

"That's right. We understand each other without words."

"Get a fledgling, Nikita. We'll begin," said Fyodor Fyodorovich with a certain solemnity. "Be careful, though, take this.... I see I'd better do it myself. You might squash it."

Fyodor Fyodorovich carefully extricated a fledgling from the nest and wrapped it up in a clean rag.

"You know what we'll do? We'll put it out to nurse with a sparrow Here—" Gently taking the match-like leg of the fledgling between finger and thumb, Fyodor Fyodorovich clipped a ring upon it.

"There we are! This fledgling must be weighed at regular intervals—and weigh one of those left in the nest, to be used as a control. We'll see how our sparrow treats



it, and where the fledgling goes next year. And we'll transfer a few sparrows to the blackcap." Fyodor Fyodorovich walked away with Nikita, Gromada's eyes following them out of sight.

"Does he know you have left Sharov's class?" asked Stepan, when the two men had disappeared in the dense foliage.

"No."

"Why don't you tell him?"

"It'll be a long story.... And an unpleasant one."

"He'll understand."

"I'm not so sure of that," Gromada answered, adding quietly after a short pause, "Supposing you, Stepan, were a professor—" Stepan grinned "—And I was a professor. And supposing we'd been close friends, like we are now, for 40 years running. See what I mean?"

Stepan nodded.

"Now, supposing a pupil of mine, a second-year student, whom I had loved and taught, suddenly declared that you were wrong in your scientific approach, and left your laboratory. Whose side do you think I would take? Yours, or the side of a raw lad who had offended a real scientist and old friend of mine into the bargain?"

"You'd know which side to take," Stepan answered, looking affectionately at Gromada.

Both fell silent again. Gromada was still looking in the direction Nikita had taken. He envied Nikita, and did not want even Stepan to know this. He could not know that there was no reason to envy Nikita at that moment; Nikita's conversation with Fyodor Fyodorovich was not of a pleasant kind.

"Who was it you relieved—Varya Berezhkova?"

"Yes."

"Alla Irtishova overslept, I presume?"

Nikita did not answer. There was a certain something in Lópatin's tone which pained him.

CHAPTER 3

Fyodor Fyodorovich had appeared at a crucial moment in Nikita Orekhov's life. That was two years ago. Nikita had received an unsatisfactory mark for literature in the entrance examination for the university. Only the day before he had been on the top of the world. He had come through the exams in physics and mathematics with flying colours. And now all was over for him. He would have to go home in disgrace. There would be no sense in taking the rest of the exams, even supposing he were allowed to do so. With eleven candidates for each vacancy, what hope could there be for him? And 20 of the contestants had been honour students on graduating from secondary school, which gave them preference.

There had been only one grammar mistake in Nikita's composition. But at the oral examination in literature the professor had asked him to give Tolstoy's biography.

"Do you mean Lev Nikolayevich?" asked Nikita briskly.
"Or Alexei Konstantinovich? Or Alexei Nikolayevich?"

"I mean Lev Nikolayevich," the professor had said good-naturedly.

Nikita cheered up.

"Lev Tolstoy was born in the year 1828...."

The professor lit a cigarette and prepared to listen. But it was Nikita's misfortune that he was no good at talking. He knew that Tolstoy's life should be rendered in words unhackneyed and full of meaning and was appalled to hear his own short, jerky phrases. And he really did want to talk at length about Tolstoy, whose life, it always seemed to him, had been hard and complicated in so many respects.

"When did Tolstoy die?" interrupted the professor.

Tolstoy's death had been a matter of special concern to Nikita. He could not reconcile himself to the fact that such a famous man, so very old, had had to leave his

home and die at some remote railway station without a friend near him. But as Nikita met the professor's cold eyes, he realized at once that this was no place for confiding one's personal feelings.

"Well?" The professor was growing impatient.

When Nikita first read an account of Tolstoy's death, he had conjured up a picture of an old man walking along a road, not caring where the road led him. His unkempt beard fluttered over his chest; he was getting short of breath; it was cold, and the autumn leaves—homeless, dead, yet golden in their death—were flying round him.

"It was autumn," said Nikita forlornly.

"Perhaps you could tell us the year?" suggested the professor, a note of sarcasm creeping into his voice.

But Nikita could not remember the year. A few years before the Revolution, that much he remembered, but exactly when? Nikita was silent.

"Have you read *Anna Karenina*?" came the next question in an irritated voice.

"Oh, yes!" he answered, waking up.

"What have you to say about the heroine?"

"Karenina, Anna Arkadyevna, was an intelligent and beautiful woman," Nikita informed the professor, and then he mumbled: "... only she was weak."

The professor looked at him in bewilderment. Two girls, busy over their answers to the question papers they had just received, set up an agitated whispering just behind Nikita. The scratching of their pens on the paper stopped suddenly, warning Nikita that his reply had been a blunder and that he would have to make it good without delay. But Nikita was not to be shaken in his opinion and his only regret was that he had expressed himself so poorly; the thoughts in themselves had been so sincere, so warm, so eager! And the words so inept. A schoolboy might have used them—not he, who was all but a student!

Nikita had just begun to lose some of the awkwardness he had felt on passing from the seven-year to the full secondary school, where he had been laughed at by the boys for his halting speech. But his brief answers had always satisfied his teachers, and Maria Vasilievna had counted Nikita among her best pupils. He had even read a paper on Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter* before the literary circle.

When he was in the ninth form, they had elected him Secretary of the school Komsomol organization, and all members of the Komsomol had understood him perfectly. Often Nikita had to attend meetings of their kolkhoz board, and he had grown accustomed to the unhurried, sedate discussions, as he had grown accustomed to having the chairman—an efficient person, respected throughout the region—address him as his equal. "Send us a dozen or so of your kids, Orekhov," he would say. "The older ones, from the ninth form. For the hot-houses."

And so Nikita had become convinced that it was quite possible to get on in life expressing one's thoughts with the utmost economy and simplicity. So far this terseness had not stood in his way during the university entrance examinations. The simple and concise summarizing to which he was accustomed had been demanded of him, and he realized that he had done well in physics and mathematics. These were subjects in which all was clear and definite, there was nothing in them to stir one's emotions, to make one suffer or experience anxiety—while here, at the literature exam, Nikita was experiencing all these emotions, and emotions were things he did not know how to talk about.

The professor was silent. Nikita was aware that this wasn't the good-natured silence of the examiner who decides to give the student a break, allowing him to collect his thoughts. It was a strained silence, pregnant with growing irritation.

Nikita wanted to make the professor see why he held such an opinion of Anna Karenina—one that had grown upon him gradually. The first time he read *Anna Karenina*, he enjoyed it, and he began reading it aloud to his father in the evenings. The people Tolstoy described lived quite different lives from Nikita's, but they loved and suffered and were therefore dear to him.

During the war Nikita had worked a great deal with women, and had often talked to them at length. Before this he had considered their talk at the village well as mere gossip and their quarrels and woes as trifles. And so he had treated the girls at school with contempt. But when the war came and they had to part with their sons and husbands, he saw them take all the hard work on their own shoulders, for only women, children, old men and invalids were left in the villages. The women had become as taciturn and austere as soldiers. A woman was elected chairman of their kolkhoz. Nikita had seen her in a time of great grief. Her son Andrei, Nikita's friend, came for him one day: a notification of the death of Andrei's father had come from Stalingrad. It was very quiet in Andrei's home. Andrei's mother, Maria Petrovna, was standing motionless by the window, her sunburnt hands grasping the edge of the window-sill. It seemed as if the wood of the window-sill must give under that tense grip. "Turned to stone," the neighbours said, and the phrase seemed to Nikita to express grief as no other phrase did.

Nikita had re-read *Anna Karenina* quite recently. He found he remembered the characters and events of the book perfectly. And the same sense of pity for Anna Karenina that he had experienced before came over him when he began reading. But as he went on, Anna seemed to him more and more remote, and oddly helpless.

"This is what I think about Anna Karenina—people shouldn't have been so hard on her for her great love.

But after all one has to go through all sorts of things. How could she throw herself under a train, and she with two children? And she left Seryozha to Karenin. As if he could bring him up to be a real man!"

Catching the professor's eye, Nikita saw that his answer had angered him. How was Nikita to know that only yesterday the editor of Tolstoy's works, for which the professor was writing notes, had told him that he did not allow for the psychology of the modern reader. And the professor now saw that the student Orehov was that very modern reader whose psychology he had not allowed for.

"Don't you think you're taking rather a lot on yourself?" said the professor irritably. "Tolstoy certainly did not consider Anna Karenina a weakling. On the contrary, she defied society. She is one of the strongest, probably the strongest of all the female characters created by Tolstoy."

"I don't take anything on myself," said Nikita. "I just say what I think."

The professor, evidently considering the discussion on Anna Karenina closed, asked for the year in which Pushkin wrote *The Captain's Daughter*. Nikita answered. He was delighted with the question and could have spoken at length on this work. But the professor asked no more about it, and wanted to know the year in which Pushkin had visited Moscow University, and what Goncharov had written on this point. Nikita had never heard that Pushkin had visited Moscow University and began eagerly asking the professor what Pushkin had said about it and where he had been—in the building they were in at the moment, or some other?

"It's for me to question you, and not the other way about," said the professor angrily. "You'd better tell me the year in which *The Storm* was written and when it was first staged. Or aren't you interested in Ostrovsky?"

Nikita was interested in Ostrovsky, but such details were unknown to him.

Nikita was fond of reading, and was a thoughtful reader, but he did not know how to cram. The dates of historical events fixed themselves in his memory, but not in the form of the year, the month, and the day of the month, as given in calendars. When he thought of them he saw before him the lean figure and dishevelled grey hair of Suvorov, the crimson banner on the battleship *Potemkin*, the arm of Lenin outstretched over the armoured car; Nikita imagined this moment so vividly that it seemed to him he could hear the very voice of Lenin. And the dates were remembered without effort.

The literature teacher had never insisted on her pupils learning the dates of literary events by heart.

And here was the professor asking dates and names connected with the most insignificant events. After making several mistakes Nikita became thoroughly confused and answered the next questions so lamely and sketchily that anyone might have doubted his knowledge. At the end of forty minutes the professor shrugged his shoulders and exchanged glances with his assistant. An obvious failure.

After the exam Nikita wandered aimlessly about the university and at last found himself in the zoological museum. It was there he would have studied but for that accursed literature. He was surrounded by the skeletons of curious and enormous animals, stuffed birds with vivid feathers, skulls of every variety—the world of his dreams, now become inaccessible. It was by no means certain whether he would pass next year, either. Dropping into a chair near a mammoth's skeleton, Nikita gave himself up to despair. It was here that Fyodor Fyodorovich found him.

Even when he sat close to the mammoth, Nikita's great height could not fail to be remarked. Anyone could see

with what care he had been equipped for Moscow: the jacket fitted his broad shoulders, the new high boots gleamed. But the shoulders were now sagging, and the whole frame expressed such obvious grief that Fyodor Fyodorovich, who during his 35 years in the university had had the opportunity of observing students in varying circumstances, soon diagnosed the complaint.

"Failed an exam?" he asked Nikita.

"Yes," answered Nikita politely, getting up.

They looked at each other amiably for a few moments. Fyodor Fyodorovich liked tall people. The tanned face, sun-bleached hair, and confiding, bright-blue eyes set at a slight slant were frank and youthful. Nikita's apologetic glance met the kindly eyes of his questioner.

"Who let you down?" asked Fyodor Fyodorovich. "Boyle-Mariotte, or Newton and his accursed binomial theorem?"

Touching the mammoth's leg gingerly with his hand, Nikita answered: "No—Anna Karenina."

Fyodor Fyodorovich gave him a look and burst out laughing. He coughed, wiped away the tears, laughed and coughed again. Nikita watched him grimly until a smile broke over his own face.

"Such a charming woman, too!" spluttered the professor through his laughter.

"She wasn't included in our school-programme, you see," Nikita said sadly. "So I just said what I thought about her."

Fyodor Fyodorovich stopped laughing. He was not sure whether his own feelings about Anna Karenina were in strict conformity with school-programmes. Unwilling to delve further into the problem, he paced the floor between the mammoth and the giraffe.

"And how do you stand with other subjects?"

"Top marks in physics and mathematics."

"Which department do you wish to enter?"

Nikita did not catch the question.

"What are you interested in studying? Birds? Fish? Fungi?"

"The mouse—he's the one I'm after," said Nikita firmly.

Fyodor Fyodorovich chuckled. "Interested in voles? In field rodents?"

"Yes."

Nikita proceeded to tell Fyodor Fyodorovich, at length and in detail, what a menace the vole was, and how he had decided to deliver mankind from the noxious pest. He spoke of how the vole population varied from year to year. He described the kind of vole in the district he came from, how it made nests in hayricks in the winter. He named the food it liked best, and the food it did not like so much, talked of the tunnels it made in the snow, spoiling the winter crops. He knew which kind of field rodent dug holes in the ground, and which made spherical nests on the ground or in bushes. He described the size and frequency of the litters—six, eight, even eleven at a time, the young ones in their turn producing litters in six weeks' or two months' time. . . .

Nikita talked for nearly half an hour, and Fyodor Fyodorovich listened to him without interrupting, his head on one side, his legs planted wide apart. Then he said, "Wait here!" and, striding over to the door, disappeared in the dark corridor.

Nikita sat down by the mammoth again. A flaxen-haired girl passed by, casting a glance which he found spiteful in his direction; she lingered for a moment and was gone. She must have failed at the examinations too, for Nikita never met her again.

He waited a whole hour for Fyodor Fyodorovich. Nikita never knew what happened during that time.

Fyodor Fyodorovich attacked the dean first. The dean of the biology faculty was Khrust, and Fyodor Fyodorovich could remember him as a modest student. Never remarkable for any special ability, he had been a conscientious worker. His entire career had passed under the eyes of Fyodor Fyodorovich: after taking a university degree he had done post-graduate research work in microbiology. The year before the war broke out he was made assistant dean, and Fyodor Fyodorovich, who considered him a modest, business-like young man and efficient organizer, had been among those who had supported his nomination.

During the war the university was evacuated to Central Asia. It was there that Khrust had become dean. Professor Lopatin was sent to Siberia by the Government to organize breeding-stations. He was one of the best fur-experts in the Soviet Union.

Lopatin and Khrust only met after the university and Lopatin had both returned to Moscow. Fyodor Fyodorovich arrived at the station in Moscow, happy as a boy. He was quite alone, and had travelled light, with nothing but a small rucksack, having left his family in Siberia. He went straight to the university, deeply moved by this return to his beloved town.

At last he saw the Kremlin once more. As he stood looking at it, he remembered himself as a mere boy, when he had first come to the university. He recalled the stern, mocking Timiryazev; Menzbir with his attentive glance; Severtsev; his teachers, his comrades, the hungry student years, clashes with the gendarmes in 1905. He remembered his first scientific work, his first sleepless nights, the whole long road which had brought him up to the present. He felt neither tiredness nor weakness. He was filled with the joy of returning.

He was seized with a longing to sit down this very minute at the table in his little laboratory, and to lecture

to his students. To be working and teaching again. He went straight to the dean's room. He had something to tell him about the breeding-stations which had been set up in Siberia.

But the dean was not able to see Professor Lopatin that day. And he was not able to see him the next day, nor the day after. It was almost a week before they met. At first Fyodor Fyodorovich did not recognize him. Khrust had acquired languid movements, looked patronizingly at his interlocutor, answered at random. Every now and then he interrupted Fyodor Fyodorovich. He answered his questions with an enigmatic "mm" or "ah", leaving Fyodor Fyodorovich to guess at their significance. While talking, Khrust flung his head so far back that his eyes could not be seen, and only his chin was visible.

It quickly became clear that Khrust did not like Professor Lopatin, and Professor Lopatin did not like the dean.

Khrust never went near the laboratory, and it was no easy matter to see him to talk about the affairs of the university. Therefore the dean knew very little of what was going on in the faculty, but he was always ready to decide all questions on the spur of the moment, and never asked for anyone's advice. Fyodor Fyodorovich disliked the dean for this. And the dean disliked Professor Lopatin for being hard to handle. The dean liked easy-going people.

Though always polite, Lopatin was continually arguing on points which seemed to the dean beneath his notice. These things irritated Khrust more and more. He felt himself getting cross whenever Fyodor Fyodorovich entered his room, and when Fyodor Fyodorovich spoke at meetings and before the Party Bureau, Khrust interrupted him much more frequently than he did anyone else. Indeed, the dean was hardly ever obliged to interrupt anyone but Professor Lopatin.

During evacuation, the Chair of Genetics fell to Professor Shumsky, who got on splendidly with Khrust. Shumsky gained more and more authority in the faculty. His influence grew from day to day. The holders of several Chairs were almost imperceptibly substituted by professors who were friends of Shumsky, and these lauded him to the skies and considered his achievements in the sphere of genetics outstanding. Even Lopatin's old friend Sharov—a great scientist, and a good-humoured, peaceable man, whose whole life had been spent in the laboratory—got on well with Khrust.

The dean gradually lost the habit of being opposed and became utterly intolerant of criticism. But Fyodor Fyodorovich criticized the dean in private conversations, at faculty meetings, before the Academic Council, and at Party meetings. And he criticized him with such conviction that sometimes the dean himself began to wonder if he could possibly be in the wrong. But he quickly conquered this unpleasant sensation and fell upon Fyodor Fyodorovich with counter-accusations. It was very easy to criticize Fyodor Fyodorovich, he had so many tasks and commissions to fulfil for the Party; there was always something that could be found fault with. When, however, Fyodor Fyodorovich began to straighten out knots in the work of the faculty, he saw to his astonishment that this, too, irritated the dean. Their relations became particularly strained during entrance examinations.

Both the dean and Shumsky, the chairman of the selection committee, showed a preference for candidates from Moscow, whom they considered to be better prepared, besides causing less trouble, in that they did not need room in a hostel.

The dean had a weakness for the children of celebrities—writers, artists and scientists, and liked to oblige his personal friends by getting their children in.

But Professor Lopatin did not care in the least whether a student's father was famous or not. His lifelong experience had taught him that the offspring of talented and hard-working parents were by no means invariably a success. And after they graduated it was sometimes difficult to get them to work anywhere outside Moscow.

Professor Lopatin was eager to enroll people who had lived close to Nature before entering the university, and who really knew and loved her. His acquaintanceship and correspondence were immense, and every year, long before the entrance examinations, he would inform the dean's office or joyfully tell Shumsky that his friend, chairman of a large fishing co-operative, had found them a lad who was a real genius. Besides getting top marks in all his subjects at school, he knew all the ways of fish and had read innumerable books on ichthyology. Another time he discovered an extremely talented girl, a hunter, somewhere in the heart of the taiga, who had, however, only finished elementary school. Professor Lopatin wrote her a long letter enjoining her to attend evening courses, and when she finished secondary school, nothing could stop Lopatin from getting her into the university.

Michurin stations, secondary schools, District Departments of Public Education, kept Professor Lopatin informed as to young people with a bent for biology who had finished secondary school and were promising "material" for Moscow University.

In Moscow itself Fyodor Fyodorovich had long been organizing school circles conducted by his own students, so that he knew where to look for future biologists among Moscow school children.

Professor Lopatin made a point of getting acquainted with students taking the entrance examinations, so that by the time the selection committee met he knew a great deal about them—where they lived, where they had studied, whether their parents were alive, what were their favourite

subjects, what books they had read, and what professions they hoped to qualify for. He came to the selection committee with definite views as to who should be accepted, and argued himself hoarse every time.

All this the dean found very tiresome, and after Fyodor Fyodorovich had told him of Orekhov, he gave him a curt answer: "I have no authority to do it. I can do nothing for you."

"It's not for me, it's for the faculty. I tell you, he's a highly gifted young man."

Khrust wearily shrugged his shoulders. He was within his rights, and Lopatin left his office in the worst of moods. He stopped to think for a moment in the corridor. He must help Orekhov. Then he made for Auditorium 120, where the literature exam was being held. He came just at the break, and found the professor alone: the members of the commission were smoking in the corridor, and this suited Lopatin perfectly. But when he named Nikita to the professor of literature, the latter started indignantly.

"I never saw such an oaf!" he cried. "Nothing is sacred for him."

Fyodor Fyodorovich let him run on, and then cautiously asked him what it was exactly that Orekhov had said. The professor told him.

"But really, you know," said Fyodor Fyodorovich, "one can't help being sorry for Anna Karenina's son."

The professor fell silent, apparently he too was thinking of Anna Karenina's son. Fyodor Fyodorovich hastened to profit by the lull.

"Listen," he began, in a stage whisper. "Supposing I had just failed a student in mathematics. Then he comes to you, and the moment he opens his mouth you can tell he's a born writer, philologist, critic, a man you've been searching the world for, in fact. He might become your best pupil, the one person to whom you could impart your most cherished dreams."

That was a slight exaggeration on the part of Fyodor Fyodorovich; he imparted his most cherished dreams with the utmost generosity. He could count at least 200 "favourite pupils" working all over the country, many of them professors themselves by now. But there was nothing strange in that. Fyodor Fyodorovich was simply lucky in his acquaintances.

The professor listened to him in silence, and this encouraged Fyodor Fyodorovich.

"And this lad, Nikita Orekhov, happens to be a very useful person to me. He just told me a few things about the vole I had never heard of before."

"Taking up the cudgels for another of your Lomonosovs, are you?" asked the professor who knew Lopatin too well not to understand what it was all about.

"There was only one Lomonosov," Fyodor Fyodorovich answered gravely. "He was a natural genius, and he was able to make his own way. Moscow University, which he founded and which later closed its doors on him, did not have the means we now have of rallying all the talented people in our country. We are the masters. If we manage things intelligently, we need not miss one talented person."

"And who is this Orekhov whom we can't afford to miss?" the professor asked.

"He's absolutely indispensable to us. He's a born biologist, just as some people are born poets."

"But this poet of yours can't even speak coherently, let alone think coherently."

"How can you say so!" cried Fyodor Fyodorovich indignantly. "He's an extremely profound young man. And he speaks beautifully: laconically, vividly, without wasting words. You must have a better look at him. Let him have another go and judge for yourself. You won't regret it, I assure you."

After he had passed his examinations in other subjects, for each of which he had received an excellent mark, Nikita again appeared before the professor of literature.

As he sauntered up and down the passage outside Auditorium 120, Fyodor Fyodorovich told himself that he was merely enjoying a peaceful smoke. In half an hour the door burst open and a flushed Nikita bounced into the corridor.

"Well?" asked Fyodor Fyodorovich.

"I passed," answered Nikita.

And so Nikita Orekhov became a student of the Moscow University.

CHAPTER 4

"First we'll take its weight and its measurements," Fyodor Fyodorovich was saying. He took the small scales out of his pocket and handed Nikita the box of weights. He put the fledgling on the scales. The little dark ball of its heart could be seen pulsating through the pink skin. The tiny head with its dark, unseeing eyes hung helplessly on its limp neck. At a touch from Fyodor Fyodorovich the fledgling raised its head and opened wide its large yellow beak.

"He thinks you're his mother," laughed Nikita.

"Fyodor Fyodorovich!" called out somebody in a shrill cheerful voice. Professor Sharov was approaching them with a light, swinging gait.

His name fitted him perfectly—"shar" means "globe" in Russian. He seemed to be made of globes: a huge round stomach, a bald round head, twinkling round eyes. It was inconceivable that so much corpulence should be able to move with such agility. Lopatin, who was kneeling on the ground with the scales in his hands, looked up at him as Nikita strove to pick up a 200-milligramme weight with pincers.

"Still weighing birdies?" asked Sharov. In his white linen suit he towered over them like a huge snow-bank.

"Still weighing them," Lopatin admitted.

"How can you spare the time, Fyodor Fyodorovich?"

"Time?" echoed Lopatin. "The only time I grudge is the time that goes in sleep. Now, then—I think that's right—7.2 grammes. An infant Hercules." Removing the fledgling from the scales and placing it on a tree-stump, Fyodor Fyodorovich waited for Nikita to make a sketch of it.

"Finished? That's right! Like to have a look?" he asked, handing the sketch to Sharov.

Sharov glanced at it and nodded approval. Not even Sharov's favourite pupil, Arkadi Korenev, could draw so well. Fyodor Fyodorovich watched Sharov's face triumphantly.

"Now put it in the other nest, Nikita. You climb and I'll hand the fledgling to you. And take out two sparrows."

Nikita climbed a birch-tree where a family of pert field sparrows had made a home in a little nest-box intended for starlings. Fyodor Fyodorovich handed the fledgling to him. Sharov, his hands behind his back, his belly protruding, watched them disapprovingly. Lopatin gave him a meaningful smile as he carefully received the sparrows from Nikita's hands.

"Now," he said when Nikita had jumped to the ground, "make a sketch of the fledgling left in the nest, and weigh it every day. It is of great importance to compare their growth."

"Is Comrade Student having his day-off to-day?" interrupted Sharov.

"No," Nikita answered, somewhat confused. "I have been on duty already, and in an hour lectures begin. Today's is to be on a complex theme—the diet of frogs. This is a spare hour."

"Complex theme, another of your pet ideas," Sharov said disapprovingly to Lopatin when Nikita went away.

Lopatin seated himself on a tree-stump from which he could observe the nest, and started smoking. "Why don't you sit down? You get tired standing and it makes you cross."

"I don't dare to sit down. It takes me half an hour to get up. For the same reason I never let myself be ill. If I ever take to my bed, I'll never be able to leave it. My constitution won't allow it." Here Sharov gave a shrill laugh. "Besides, why should we sit here? Better come round to my place."

"Wait a minute. I want to see how my sparrows receive the foundling. Maybe they'll throw it out."

"And what's your foundling?"

"A blackcap."

"A blackcap?" said Sharov, walking round the stump on which Lopatin was sitting and stopping in front of him. "More experiments?"

"Of course. Experiments. Those very experiments you called nonsensical and meaningless fussing last year."

"I wasn't the only one."

"I don't care a jot for their opinion. But I did think *you* would understand. There's nothing strange in Shumsky being against my experiments. It's quite natural he should be."

"Why natural?"

"Because," Fyodor Fyodorovich answered, "because your Illarion Enastovich Shumsky preaches pure science. Science for science's sake."

"You are not a geneticist, Fyodor, and you have no right to judge."

"Oh yes I have! How much money was allotted to the genetics laboratory? Three times the amount allotted to our laboratory, wasn't it? And what does he do? Fusses about with his flies and moths! Counting chromosomes!"

"Evidently it is necessary."

"I used to think that too. But now I see it's not the least bit necessary."

"I tell you you're wrong, and you know nothing about it," interrupted Sharov gaily.

He was always pleased as a boy to argue with Lopatin.

"Besides he by no means confines himself to flies. He's doing great work on questions of stock-breeding, developing new breeds."

"I don't seem to have heard of it."

"Why should he report to you? Do you tell him about your birds?"

"I would, but he's not interested."

"All these are nothing but dreams, Fyodor. But Shumsky would be interested in your ideas."

"I've tried to tell him about them—that time at the Academic Council, remember? He heard me out. Then as chairman he said: 'We thank Professor Lopatin for his valuable information,' and proceeded to the next question. That's what you might call a polite slap in the face. Well, and what's this work he's doing?"

"I can't tell you in detail, but I know some such work is going on."

Sharov glanced obliquely at his friend. Noting with satisfaction that Lopatin seemed a bit discomfited, he decided to consolidate his victory.

"You're very fickle, Fyodor. You used to like Shumsky. Remember? You said: 'I like good-looking, healthy, energetic people.' You called him a cultured man, a scientist showing development."

"I did. And I waited for him to develop. Waited patiently. One year, two years, four years. But nothing came of it. I was deceived in my expectations. I saw him wasting his energy making a career for himself. That's where it all went. Not a trace of humility left in him, and

no real results from all that work so far as I can see."

"You simply don't know," said Sharov stubbornly.

"Well, I'll go on waiting," sighed Lopatin, still unconvinced. "But believe me, Nikolai Alexandrovich, you shouldn't stick up for him. The worst of it is that he is not alone in the false path he has chosen; he is drawing others after him."

"Now don't get all worked up," said Sharov soothingly. "It's much too hot to lose one's temper. Let's go and have some tea. Nadya will have something special for us. There goes your sparrow."

The sparrow dived into the nest and was out of it again in less than a minute. Things were all right there, apparently.

"All right, let's go," said Lopatin, and they set out in leisurely fashion for the biological station.

"What a walker you used to be! Remember?" exclaimed Lopatin regretfully. "I never saw such a walker! And your biceps! What biceps you had!"

"I could lift four poods with one hand," said Sharov, panting slightly.

"You and I have covered a lot of ground, haven't we? You were a grand fellow to go on expeditions with. Oh, what an outdoor naturalist the laboratory has devoured!"

Sharov lost his temper.

"In the first place you spend months and years on end in the laboratory yourself, and in the second place if I hadn't spent all those years in the laboratory you wouldn't know a whole lot, my friend, that you now do."

"All right, all right. I only wanted to wake you up a little," said Lopatin in a pacifying tone.

But Sharov was not to be so easily appeased.

"Granted," Sharov began, slightly out of breath. "Granted that experiments on transplanting birds are necessary and interesting and promise practical

results, but why must you yourself weigh the fledglings? Do you really think Vera Vasilievna couldn't manage it herself?"

"There you go again, Nikolai Alexandrovich. 'Junior research workers can carry out the practical work,'" said Lopatin, imitating Sharov's shrill monotone. "No good, Nikolai Alexandrovich! Of course you prefer to spend the summer in the laboratory or go from one health resort to another. But the point is——"

"Don't you think you've argued enough for one day, Fyodor Fyodorovich?" interrupted Sharov.

"I'm not arguing," went on Lopatin. "There's nothing to argue about, Nikolai Alexandrovich. I'm right, and you're wrong, that's all. The student's first encounters with Nature should be guided by an experienced professor with ample knowledge. Like you or me."

"Don't you think that's too much for a second-year student?"

"Not a bit too much, Nikolai Alexandrovich, not a bit," retorted Lopatin. "You spoke of waste of time. But you yourself know that even weighing a fledgling requires skill. The bird must be handled with care; the student must be shown how to sketch it; his attention must be drawn to certain points, and while his eyes and hands are getting accustomed to the work, I explain to him what it's all about, and what our aims are. Take Nikita Orekhov. In what light, do you think, does he see himself at the present moment? In the light of a scientist, an innovator. Prospects open up before him; thoughts crowd into his head. And it would be a great shame to teach him in any other way. His is the creative mind; he has talent. He's not like that Korenev of yours."

"What's wrong with that Korenev of mine?"

"There's nothing wrong with him, except that you are ruining him."

"I ruining him?" protested Sharov.

"Of course you are. He's fond of you, Nikolai Alexandrovich, and that's as it should be. The pupil ought to be fond of his teacher. But what do you let the pupil do? Count the hair and teeth of your rodents. Measure their skulls. State species and subspecies."

"If systematics is unnecessary in your opinion, then why are you so strict at the examinations? The students groan and say even I'm easier to please than you."

"Why do you pretend not to understand me, Nikolai Alexandrovich? Of course systematics is necessary, and I will always be exacting, and of course detailed attention to morphology is indispensable. The question is, what do we need it all for? That's what the student must be made to realize—why is it that he must study systematics and morphology, why do people work in laboratories for years on end? He must be shown the most important thing—the real aim of science. Say you have passed Korenev in systematics. Very well, then. Now you must show him it in all its vastness, in all its potentialities. Let him dream. Make him experiment, seek, blunder, suffer, spend a sleepless night or two. You yourself have known what it means, haven't you?"

"Haven't I just!"

"Why don't you want him to experience it, then? What's the task you gave him this year? A tight, narrow little task. Nothing but taking measurements, learning by heart, specifying. Not a single experiment, not a chance to make mistakes."

"But I'm making a real scientist of him. Before he begins making mistakes, he must learn his ABC's."

"There, you've said it yourself, Nikolai Alexandrovich—the alphabet. What do people learn the alphabet for? A boy goes to school and is told: 'This is "A", and this is "B".' But at the same time it's explained to him what words can be made from these letters. If that isn't done, 'A' will remain 'A', and nothing more. You have

shown Korenev the letters, but to what end? He'll learn his systematics, be able to define the species, learn by heart the distribution of a given species. And very likely that species of, say, gopher, is not to be found any more. That gopher of yours has been lying about in your laboratory these 20 years, not only dead, but moth-eaten. Perhaps they have planted orchards in the steppe where he used to live. Or a lake full of fishes. There's your systematics for you. You'll ruin him, Nikolai Alexandrovich, that's what you'll do. Systematics is necessary, but it must be made a living, dynamic branch of science, in constant motion. And what you teach him is a dead and petrified sort of systematics."

"He has a real bent for systematics," retorted Sharov.

Stopping abruptly, Lopatin faced Sharov, blocking the narrow path which they were following.

"That may be," he said. "But I do know when a scientist's heart is in his work, and when it isn't."

"You have no right to——" Sharov gasped out.

"Yes, I have. I don't want to hurt your feelings. You're angry with me, but you shouldn't be. And please don't walk so fast; it's too hot. Whatever you and I start talking about we begin to argue, and we always argue about the same thing: does a certain scientific problem answer the demands of real life or not? Take our disagreement as to the students' education. Shumsky trains laboratory assistants, while what the country needs is scientific innovators. It is precisely laboratory assistants that *he* needs—people who will obey him implicitly, without the inconvenient habit of independent thinking. Although you yourself have no use for them, you, too, have started training them, partly out of laziness, partly out of complacency. 'Now that I'm old and famous,' you reason, 'I can relax.' But you can't. You scold me for the complex themes I give my students. I know these complex themes give a great deal of trouble, but then they help to make

real scientists. And they are of immediate use, too. My students have been working on frogs for two years, and I mean to collect their results and publish them—and it will make quite an effective little book, you'll see. You make fun of my experiments. But what right have I to forget about the menace of vermin to our forests? If I were you I'd think of it too. Voles and gophers are raising havoc there, and all you do is describe subspecies."

"I can't do everything at once."

"There's no need to. You work all by yourself all the time. Is that right? No. And all of you keep attacking my work. You do. And the Academic Council does. 'Lopatin's a rebel', 'Lopatin's a dreamer'. But look at the way the work is done. Take the naturalists: they tiptoe about the woods and observe. They watch the flight of a bird, note where it perches. And we teach our students to sit tight in their blinds and note the number of flights, note how many songs the finch sings in 24 hours. Thinking is not so essential for this. The great thing is not to disturb anything. Watch the nest from afar. As to what's going on inside the nest, that is the birds' business, not yours. Then come the morphologists. They know every blood-vessel by heart; they can draw any reptile's digestive system in their sleep; but how change of climate and other conditions affect it does not concern our morphologists. Take yourself. Nobody knows rodents as you do; you've been studying them for 40 years. But where do you study them? On the lab table. Away from the soil. You'll never learn the origin of new characteristics in your mice that way. What are you studying for? What is your final aim? Is it knowledge? That is not enough. Your aim must be perfectly definite: to allow as few harmful rodents, and as many useful ones as possible, to survive. This task cannot be performed within the walls of the laboratory alone, Nikolai Alexandrovich. And no one person can do it. You like to tiptoe about the woods, but I don't see

why I should walk on tiptoe over my own grounds. I want to step firmly, like a master, now breaking off a dry twig, now planting a tree, stocking a pond with fish, breeding beavers on its banks, destroying harmful caterpillars."

"Like God Almighty," Sharov said caustically.

"God?" said Lopatin deprecatingly. "Like a scientist. A biologist. Think what biology is. The science of life—that's what it is. Biology is a great word, and it gives us great rights. We can do untold things, but not if we work isolated from one another. We must all work together. We must help one another. But you and your friends have split it up into different words: naturalist, morphologist, systematist, zoo-geographer, endocrinologist, ecologist. And each of you follows his own path—purposely kept as narrow as possible. Follows it as if it were divided by stone walls from all the other paths. But in reality there's only one broad path for all. And to know what each is doing, to think in common, to pursue common aims, does not mean to squander one's energies.

"Nor must we restrict ourselves to our own department, or our own university. You have a study, Nikolai Alexandrovich. Its walls are thick, its windows rather small. And what is my laboratory? All the nurseries and animal farms in the Union! All the sanctuaries and hunting grounds. Your staff consists of five people, but I have thousands of veterinaries, biologists and zoologists working in my laboratory. You should see the research work they do! What bold experiments!"

"You have a school study circle attached to the Chair. Why don't you include fifth-form pupils?"

"Why didn't you suggest it before? It's a very good idea. I'll set everyone a task for next spring. Don't laugh. My schoolboys are no joke. You can't think what a splendid idea you've given me, Nikolai Alexandrovich. A pity

their holidays are so late—the fledglings will have time to grow up. But never mind! We'll work on the second lot of fledglings. They'll transfer fledglings for me out of sheer interest, and we won't have to pay anyone for the work. School children are scattered all over the country in the summer. They'll come to me and tell me everything, I'll only have to listen. Just think what a lot of exciting things go on in our country, Nikolai Alexandrovich! And for some reason we treat our students as if they were hot-house plants. Why shouldn't we send our students about? I could send mine to cattle-breeding farms and you could send your rodent brigade, headed by Ivan Ostapovich Gromada, that assistant of yours, to the steppe districts."

"Gromada isn't working with me any more."

"How's that?"

"He says his mother has recovered and he doesn't need to earn money any more. He only wants to study. But as far as I can judge that's not the real reason. He doesn't want to work with me. He has more or less the same opinion of me that you have."

"Come, come! He must be mad. He managed to get into your laboratory from the very first year of his studies. That means a lot. It's a bit early for him to start criticizing you. And I was going to invite him to join Belevsky's brigade for transplanting birds."

"Why not? He's perfectly free."

"I never expected that," said Fyodor Fyodorovich.

"Nor did I. But you must give up the idea of sending students about the country. There isn't any money for that. As it is I don't know what I'm going to do about the students' practice."

"You shouldn't have let Kuzmich go," scolded Fyodor Fyodorovich. "A man like that—he should never have been allowed to go. A hunter, an experienced, practical man, a man who knows every tree, every burrow in the

forest. And the students were looked after splendidly here."

"You don't know all the circumstances," began Sharov.

"Tell me them, then."

"In a minute. Here we are."

Sharov climbed the steps to the porch.

"Why, you've moved all your things here. How are you, Nadezhda Ivanovna?"

Fyodor Fyodorovich glanced round the spacious room. The bed had a rug thrown over it, the shelves were filled with books, jars of jam stood on the window-sill, and on the table were a lamp and a tubby samovar surrounded by cups. Nadezhda Ivanovna always put a lot of cups on the table in case of emergency, knowing very well that the room would fill up. The Sharovs were famous for their hospitality. There were always crowds of students in their Moscow flat, drinking tea, discussing zoology, listening to Sharov as he played the 'cello, and looking at his collections, which were the talk of the university.

Sharov found time, in addition to his scientific work, for all sorts of other occupations. He was prone to sudden fits of boyish enthusiasm, which later cooled off as suddenly as they had broken out. But his hobbies were permanent, and he had spent years in accumulating his collections of cigarette-boxes and the tail-feathers of birds. Sharov declared that the pictures on cigarette-boxes afforded rich material for historians, and his collection of feathers was his pride. But Sharov's wife, Nadezhda Ivanovna, known to her friends as Nadya, was always vexed with Fyodor Fyodorovich when he brought his friend a feather as a present.

"Do stop it, Fedya," she would say, as severely as she could. "He has eight thousand of those feathers already.

They get so dusty. My maid isn't young. We have visitors all the time. I can't exploit her for the sake of tail-feathers."

"Well, what are those circumstances you mentioned?" asked Fyodor Fyodorovich, sipping his hot, strong tea with enjoyment.

"Your Kuzmich showed up at the dean's office and suggested setting up Lysenko sectors at the bio-station. He says the kolkhoz workers are interested."

"Well, what about it?"

"Khrust instantly told him to give up the idea. But he was stubborn. 'I'm the boss at the bio-station,' he said, 'and I'll do as I like there.' Well, you can see for yourself——"

"No I can't." Fyodor Fyodorovich got up and began walking up and down the room. "The bio-station is the scientific centre of the district. Kuzmich is perfectly right. We should have thought of it ourselves."

"And a good thing we didn't. It's not our job. We've had enough of Lysenko and his breeding-stations. Some more tea, please, Nadya."

"I seem to remember a time when you spoke differently about Lysenko. You used to consider him talented."

"And I still do. But people shouldn't try and over-reach themselves. He's a fine agronomist. And that's splendid. Let him stick to his job and we'll stick to ours. Not everyone takes the same path in science."

"I can't quite make out," said Fyodor Fyodorovich, narrowing his eyes, "who I'm talking to—Sharov or Shumsky?"

"What makes you so hard on Shumsky, Fedya?" put in Nadya. "He's such a nice man. You used to praise him yourself, you said he was cultivated and a good husband, and now——"

"You're a difficult chap, Fedya. You quarrel with everyone." Sharov sucked his spoon. "Better have some jam—it's strawberry jam, only made yesterday."

"So if I hadn't been away at work, and had stood up for Kuzmich, that would have been put down to my being a difficult chap, too?" asked Lopatin, gazing fixedly at Sharov.

"Hold on a bit! Tell me instead what to do with the bio-station. It's driving me crazy. How are we to feed the students? Where are we to lodge them? Your Kuzmich managed things very well here, I must say."

"Leave Kuzmich alone. He saved all the property during the war. Hid it underground and went off to fight as a partisan himself. When he came back he restored everything in a fortnight. You never worked with him, you don't know his ways."

"Don't get cross, now. Advise me what to do."

"Don't drive away honest people and take on scoundrels."

"The present director is no scoundrel. He's simply at a loss what to do."

But Sharov was mistaken. The new director of the bio-station really was a scoundrel. In the few months in which he had been at his new post, he had built himself a house from the trees in the bird-sanctuary, acquired goats, sheep, poultry and a cow, planted a big plot with raspberries, and taken unto himself the bee-keeper's wife, not to mention a few hives by way of make-weight. He regarded the arrival of the students as a kind of elemental disaster. He did not in the least care how the students were to live. Timber was brought to him in the winter to put up quarters for the students. This timber he used to build himself a shed, while for the students he knocked together a long, pock-marked barrack-like building from old boards and sheets of three-ply. This edifice let in the rain and was not wired for electricity. There was nothing

for the students to do in the evenings but listen to the entertaining stories of Yura Dozhdikov, or go and sit round a camp-fire on the bank of the river, a practice, by the way, which the director instantly vetoed. The bio-station had no bath-house, nowhere to dry shoes, no table-cloths or oilcloth, and there were not even any tanks for drinking-water. Nobody knew where all these things had gone. Before going over to his new post in a neighbouring forestry centre, Kuzmich had handed over all these necessities, carefully inventoried. And now there wasn't even an inventory. There was no nurse, either. The director's wife was the cook. She prepared such loathsome brews that even the students, who were not very particular, could not eat them.

"Well, what am I to do with him?" asked Sharov, now thoroughly alarmed by Lopatin's account of the director's ways.

"Do? Sue the rascal! Without loss of time! And I'll go to Balashov and get him to find us an honest man. We'll have to ask the collective farm to lend us a couple of carpenters to repair the drying-room, bath and living-quarters. We'll get up a voluntary work-day for the students to help them."

"I have no authority to take students away from their studies," objected Sharov, after a pause. "And I can't sue the director without the dean's sanction."

"And if you saw a man picking somebody's pocket, would you go and consult the authorities, too? You're just afraid of a quarrel, Nikolai Alexandrovich, that's what it is."

"You're right, Fedya," agreed Sharov, mollified. "I am. I hate quarrelling." And he again held out his cup to Nadya.

His round, stolid, perspiring countenance seemed quite unfamiliar to Lopatin at that moment. Sharov had never before aroused his antipathy. They had often argued,

quarrelled, fallen out, disagreed, but Lopatin had never for a moment ceased to love his friend. He had loved him for his gay, shrill voice, his boyishness, his enthusiasm for the most unexpected things. And his love extended to everything connected with Sharov.

He loved the famous collections, and the 'cello. Perhaps Sharov was not much of a performer, but Lopatin enjoyed his playing. Sharov had always been a peace-loving man, who got on with everyone and trusted everyone. Lopatin had forgiven him his good-humoured tolerance of people with whom he himself had nothing in common, realizing that this trustfulness was born of his friend's purity of soul. Sharov had had a bad time up to the Revolution, but he had struggled on bravely and emerged with a boundless faith in all that went on in his native land. He would not and could not believe that Khrust was a careerist, and that Shumsky thought of nothing but his own reputation. These men had been entrusted with such important work. The Soviet Government believed in them.

And despite fierce argument and the irritation which Sharov's good nature sometimes aroused in Lopatin, he had gone on loving him.

But now it seemed to Lopatin that a number of barriers had arisen between himself and Sharov. These barriers were Sharov's tranquil countenance, the samovar, Shumsky, Kuzmich, the complacent Nadya, and Sharov's mocking attitude towards Lopatin's experiments.

Lopatin got up.

"I've given you my advice, Nikolai Alexandrovich. But you're in charge of this practical work, and it's you who will answer for it. Do as you think best."

"I'll write a report. The authorities must be kept informed."

"Go ahead. That's your business."

And with a bow to Nadya, Lopatin left the house.

CHAPTER 5

Lopatin's departure was followed by silence.

"I told you so," said Nadya at last, clattering the cups angrily. "You shouldn't have taken it on. Fedya has been in charge of practical work for years. And he got on splendidly without you. But you wouldn't listen to me."

"Leave me alone!" cried Sharov shrilly. "Leave me alone!"

Nadya took offence. She put an unwashed cup down on the table, hung the towel over the back of a chair, and sat down near the window with her back to her husband. Sharov went into the next room, which was fitted up as a laboratory. There, at the big table, sat Arkadi Korenev, as spruce as ever, his hair combed smoothly back, dissecting a field mouse. Sharov glanced at it.

"Where did you catch it?"

"I didn't. Some students brought it to me."

"You should catch them yourself."

"Very well," agreed Arkadi, though he had no very clear idea exactly where and how he was to catch them.

But his acquiescence failed to mollify Sharov, who went to his own table puffing angrily.

"What's this?" he asked, pointing to a pillow and blanket neatly folded in a corner of the sofa.

"They're mine." Arkadi was taken aback by the professor's unusual tone. "I thought I might spend the night here, Nikolai Alexandrovich. Conditions in our living quarters are simply impossible. But if you have any objection——"

"Oh, no. Stay, of course. It's a pity there isn't room for everyone."

"People have been here asking for you, Nikolai Alexandrovich."

"Who?"

"Students."

"Naturally. But who?"

"I don't know their names."

"You don't know their names? You've been studying with them for two years."

"There are hundreds of students in our department, Nikolai Alexandrovich. I know my own group, of course, but I don't know everyone in the department. You see I spend all my spare time with you. I have no time."

Sharov shrugged his shoulders.

"What did they want?"

"I didn't ask them. Professor Lopatin was with you, I said you were busy."

"Too bad."

"I was only fulfilling orders."

"Whose orders?"

"Shumsky said I wasn't to let anyone disturb you. He said you were overworked with administrative affairs as it is. So I——"

"I don't need Shumsky's protection. You're working with me, not with him. And don't ask Shumsky what Sharov is to do, ask Sharov himself. Is that clear?"

"Yes."

Arkadi shrugged his shoulders and set to work on his field mouse again.

Sharov heaved himself on to a stool at the table. He tried to work but could not concentrate. This did not often happen. Usually, as soon as he sat down at the table he forgot his surroundings and could work for an indefinite time, ten or eleven hours at a stretch.

"Nadya is right," he thought. "I shouldn't have undertaken it. What am I doing? Worrying about scoundrels, soup, drying-rooms. And it's all Fyodor's fault. And then he has the nerve to scold me."

It was true that Professor Sharov had been induced to undertake the supervision of the students' summer practical work only because of his friendship with

Lopatin.... Sharov had felt himself bound to undertake it in the circumstances.

By the spring of 1948 Shumsky and his friends had taken the management of the faculty entirely into their own hands. Doubtless, if it had not been for the war, when many younger scientists left for the front and the university was evacuated far from Moscow, Shumsky would not have got so far. However, he had succeeded in placing his men like chess figures in all the key positions. Khrust, who by this time had become Shumsky's best friend, had blossomed out.

Besides being dean of the biology faculty in Moscow, Khrust, on Shumsky's recommendation, took over a Chair of Genetics in another town, and spent several days every month in travelling. He was usually hurrying somewhere, and usually late. His name appeared frequently in reports of conferences, sessions and meetings. He was the editor of many scientific papers on the most widely varied themes. He was no longer a microbiologist. He had become a geneticist and was preparing his thesis for a doctorate under the guidance of Shumsky.

A strange situation could be observed in the biology faculty at this period: some words seemed to have lost their original meaning, and a new lexicon had sprung up. Thus, for instance, the word "opinion" had undergone a change. If the view of a professor or research worker did not coincide with that of the faculty authorities, it would not be called "opinion", but "error". Any protest addressed to Shumsky or his colleagues would be branded according to the new terminology as an "attack". The future of a professor indiscreet enough to commit an "error", or indulge in an "attack", was a foregone conclusion. He would promptly have a label attached to him, as if he were a stuffed bird. The label announced the species to which the delinquent professor was supposed from then on to belong.

After a professor had been labelled, there was no longer any need to argue with him, or try to persuade him he was wrong: he was held up to obloquy. If he persisted in his error, he would be publicly reprimanded, and a more accommodating individual would take over his lectures. His writings would never win the approval of the Academic Council.

They were not very fond of discharging people at the dean's office. Dismissals inevitably came to the notice of the Party Committee, the rector, and the Ministry of Higher Education, and that complicated matters. It was much simpler to push the refractory one quietly into the darkest corner of his own laboratory, with one of "their own" men blocking his way, to pay him money out of state funds, to use his work and make it impossible for him to open his mouth. It was a very convenient system, and in this way all who tried to raise objections were gradually silenced. Many made no attempt to raise objections. Some were silent because they loved their work and were afraid of losing it; others did not have the courage to quarrel with their chiefs, and yet others did not even try to understand what was going on around them.

Most of the biology laboratories at that time were working on problems which had nothing to do either with the demands of the country's economy or the solution of important scientific problems. And for those at the head of such laboratories to protest and criticize Shumsky would be tantamount to criticizing themselves.

There were, however, two indomitable disturbers of public peace left in the faculty: Assistant Professor Chebrets and Professor Lopatin. Chebrets read Marxism and Leninism to the students of the biology faculty. He was short and broad-shouldered, with youthful, luminous eyes. He was, indeed, still a young man, not much over forty. And his grey hair did not age him.

Chebrets was one of those teachers whose lectures are preceded by shouts of "Girls, let's take front seats", at which the girls would rush forward and crowd on to the front benches like swallows on telegraph wires.

An experienced observer could discover whether the lecture was an interesting one or not by a single sign—the difference between the number of listeners in the front and in the back rows. Chebrets lectured in a low voice, almost as if he were thinking aloud, passing backwards and forwards in front of the blackboard. From the way in which, the moment he entered the hall, he placed his note-books neatly on the reading-desk, looked at the clock to see if his watch was right, and poured himself out a glass of water, it could be seen that he was rather pedantic. In the course of a two-hour lecture, however, he did not once glance at his notes, drink water, or look at his watch. His sense of time was remarkable, and he always wound up with the words: "We will stop here, friends," precisely a minute before the bell rang. And the students, raising their eyes from their note-books, would discover with astonishment that two hours had actually passed.

It would have been hard to say what it was that made Chebrets' lectures so interesting. His style was concise and restrained, but year after year the life of the Party and the people was revealed to the students in a fascinating way; they did not merely learn this life, they were made to feel it. Chebrets transmitted the most dry facts, the most dull statistics, in ardent, living words.

Chebrets was deeply interested in the life of the faculty. He often took part in students' circles, and invariably attended Professor Lopatin's lectures on Darwinism and zoology. He always sat in the first row and listened with glowing eyes.

He was drawn ever more deeply into the life of the faculty, and was popular with the students. Much to the

annoyance of those in power on the faculty, he was elected a member, and later Secretary, of its Party Bureau.

When, therefore, he first appeared at one of Shumsky's lectures, the latter showed no sign of enthusiasm, and asked:

"What's this—an investigation?"

"Oh, no," protested Chebrets, adding humbly: "I want to learn."

And he really did attend the whole cycle, taking thorough notes of each lecture, not missing a single one. But Shumsky always suspected that the caustic notes sent up to him came from Chebrets.

Khrust did not like Chebrets either, and he did not like him for qualities that ought to have won his approbation, as dean of studies—for his exemplary discipline and skill as a teacher.

At Khrust's lectures the front seats were empty, and there was always a murmur in the hall, low-voiced, but extremely lively, and obviously having nothing to do with the theme of the lecture. Khrust was continually interrupting himself with words which never varied: "I would ask you to remember, Comrades, that I am not only a lecturer, but also your dean of studies." And these words never failed to evoke a still louder undercurrent of whispering and laughter.

As Secretary of the Party Bureau, Chebrets now attended all meetings, as well as all scientific conferences, and he invariably supported Lopatin, coming out against Shumsky and his friends, and against what was going on in the faculty.

At the beginning of term, Khrust made an attempt to get rid of Chebrets. Inviting him to his office, the dean politely advised him to give up his work in the faculty. Chebrets thanked him for the advice, but added that he had no intention of leaving.

"In that case," suggested Khrust, "perhaps you'll stop meddling in the affairs of the faculty."

"It is not the affairs of the faculty that I meddle in, but the cause of Soviet science," Chebrets explained.

"You know nothing about biology."

"Not nearly enough, that's true," agreed Chebrets, looking straight into Khrust's eyes. "But the trouble with you is that you know nothing about Marxism and Leninism."

Khrust coloured, but kept himself under control. He could not afford to fight Chebrets. Chebrets had an excellent academic record, and had come through the war with several awards; he had the active support both of the Party Committee and the rector's office.

"Ah, well," Khrust sighed, trying not to look at the frank, tanned face before him. "Let's see if we can't work together."

"I don't want to work with you," Chebrets retorted.

"What *do* you want, then?"

"I want *you* to give up working in the faculty," said Chebrets, speaking very distinctly.

Khrust did not dare to tell anyone, even Shumsky, of their conversation. He was afraid of Shumsky.

As for Professor Lopatin, he was an intolerable person—but he had to be tolerated. He was a scientist of renown, a member of the Party, a Stalin Prize winner, and a brilliant teacher.

True, the toleration extended to him was of a nature which required no little toleration from Fyodor Fyodorovich himself. Hardly any funds were allotted to his Chair, the hours given to his subject in the schedule and those for practical study were inadequate; and, as a last straw, the Academic Council refused to confirm his nomination as supervisor of the students' practical work in the summer of 1948.

Hearing of this, Fyodor Fyodorovich had burst into Sharov's laboratory in a fury.

"So I'm not working on the right lines, am I? The practical work is to be conducted on other lines? Shumsky means to give us one of his own young men. I can imagine what they'll do with our students!"

For some time Sharov watched Lopatin restlessly pacing the laboratory. Then, rising somewhat reluctantly and casting a glum look at his friend, he left the room.

"No good!" replied the dean tersely, after having heard Sharov out almost to the end of his persuasive speech. "We'll find someone else. And, by the way, the students should be given a course in genetics in their free time during the summer. There's nothing for Lopatin to do in that field."

Sharov fell silent. The tempting summer freshness of his laboratory flashed before his mind's eye. He was used to his laboratory and to his home, and hated changing his habits. He was used to getting up at the same time every day and taking the same road to the university. The aged porter at the door regularly greeted him with a "Good day, Nikolai Alexandrovich!" and he answered "Good day!" Students came to his flat in the evening, and when they left, he went back to his desk. His study was spacious, with bookshelves all along the walls and darkness lurking in the corners. The table alone was lighted up, the intense, brilliant circle of light accentuating his isolation. Perfect quiet. It was this habitual peace and quiet, his right to work in peace, that Sharov had to defend against Fyodor Fyodorovich every spring, trying to persuade him that the function of a professor was to give lectures and examine students, and not to rush about the woods and climb through swamps with them. That, he maintained, was for junior scientific workers.

Sharov came out of his reverie with a sigh.

"Now, if I were to take over the summer field-work?" he proposed. "Would you have any objections?"

"I didn't know you were fond of roughing it," said the dean.

"They say there are plenty of voles there," explained Sharov in dull tones. "And I have a certain theme to work out. I might as well use the opportunity. Otherwise I'll never set about it. It's hard to get me to make a move, you know. I hate the idea of going, but I see I shall have to." He sounded so sincere that even the sceptical Khrust believed him.

The chief reason for his credulity, however, was that a few days earlier Shumsky had said to him: "Sharov is one of us. He and I get on very well. Half the people in his laboratory are there on my recommendation." Besides, Lopatin would never raise any objection to the appointment of Sharov, would not, as was his wont, carry the matter to the Party Committee and the rector's office. And this was highly important.

Sharov returned to the laboratory in a very bad humour. Lopatin was still pacing backwards and forwards, tugging at his beard.

"Sit down!" said Sharov, easing himself into an arm-chair. "There's nothing for *you* to worry about. You've hoisted your worries on to me."

"What's this? What have I hoisted on to you?"

"The summer field-work of course! One of us had to undertake it."

Sharov's voice had grown shriller with annoyance.

"You're a genius, Nikolai Alexandrovich! Thanks a thousand times!" Lopatin spread his arms wide as if to embrace the corpulent Sharov.

"Leave me alone! I was going to take the cure at Kislovodsk. I'm 40 pounds over-weight."

"I guarantee that you'll lose 60 in the summer field-work!"

"I'm doing it only on one condition: that you'll be there, too. I'm only doing it for your sake," Sharov continued, freeing himself from his friend's embrace. "I'll be miserable there. I have work to do."

"Now don't make yourself out a martyr," answered Lopatin, who had regained his equilibrium and spoke in his usual level voice. "It'll do your work all the good in the world. You'll see at last what your voles are like in real life."

The reality which met Sharov at the biological station surpassed his worst expectations. Things might have been better organized in preceding years, but that year Sharov had few moments of peace. Lopatin kept nagging at him for money for his utopian experiments in shifting bird populations. . . . Who was to ask for the money at the dean's, did he think? Sharov? Ah, no, Fyodor Fyodorovich, Sharov begs to be excused!

With a grunt, Sharov stepped out on to the porch. How could a man be expected to work in such circumstances?

He stood there thinking for some time. He was longing to seek Lopatin out. But then he remembered all the bitter things Lopatin had said to him and changed his mind. "He will come himself," Sharov decided.

CHAPTER 6

But Fyodor Fyodorovich did not go to Sharov that day. He set out for The Streams Kolkhoz to see Zakhar Petrovich Balashov. He went after lesson hours, about six in the evening, taking Varya Berezhkova with him.

Near the bridge, on a green bank which was as smooth as if the grass on it had recently been mown, they came across Nikita, who was dissecting a frog. He was doing research work on frog nutrition, the task before him being

to catch as many frogs as possible and make painstaking analyses of the contents of their stomachs. Dissections were supposed to be performed in the laboratory, but Nikita did them on the spot. He was not used to being indoors in the summer. To soothe his conscience, Nikita found a perfectly plausible explanation: by the time he got to the laboratory the frog might have digested some of the more delicate insects, and thus the whole picture would be falsified.

The next stage of his work would take him into the entomology laboratory, where he would have to spend at least a week finding out the exact species of the insects eaten by frogs, the mode of life led by these insects, where they dwelt and what plants they fed upon. Then, under a botanist's guidance, Nikita would have to study those plants. And last of all he must examine the soils in which the plants grew—the plants that fed the insects that fed the frogs that Nikita dissected; in short, a "complex theme".

The students liked complex themes, for while they worked on them they felt they were taking part in real scientific life. Fyodor Fyodorovich always began by initiating his pupils into the purport of his own work, disclosing to them all its potentialities and prospects, and allotting them separate tasks. Simple in themselves, these tasks made the students think, experiment, and rummage in libraries.

There were ten other students as well as Nikita working on frog nutrition. This theme formed part of the practical work for first-year students, too. And the following year Fyodor Fyodorovich intended to publish the material thus accumulated.

Fyodor Fyodorovich entrusted complex themes only to those students of whose efficiency he could feel sure, to those who were capable of conducting independent research and of drawing their own conclusions from the

data collected. To the thoughtless, who had not yet discovered what they wanted, Fyodor Fyodorovich gave narrower themes, hoping to train their observation and teach them to carry out simple tasks. Thus Yura Dozhdikov was given a simple theme: "Nest-building of the grey owl in the region of the biological station". Fyodor Fyodorovich had his own reasons for giving Yura a separate theme, for he knew that if Yura's theme required his working with another student, all the work would fall upon Yura's companion.

Fyodor Fyodorovich also had his reasons for giving Nikita Orekhov a complex theme, considering as he did that Nikita was already thoroughly at home in the woods, and that it was time to inculcate in him a taste for laboratory work.

"It's high time you crept out of your mouse-hole," he said. "You must enlarge your knowledge, acquire technique."

Nikita obediently set himself to catching and dissecting frogs.

Formerly it had seemed to Nikita that frogs were everywhere, that there was no getting away from them; but as soon as he started work it appeared that there were not so many and they were not easy to catch. Four hours spent in the swamp yielded only four frogs, and these so puny and thin that it seemed unlikely there could be anything in their stomachs—if, indeed, they had stomachs at all. But what specially grieved Nikita was that all four belonged to the same species. And he had pored for two nights over the text-book in order to be able to define the species unhesitatingly! Fyodor Fyodorovich remarked sternly that he had not expected this from Nikita. Text-books should be thoughtfully studied, not learned by rote. If he had applied his mind to his reading, he would have realized that different species

take their exercise at different times of the day. To catch other species of frogs he would have to hunt for them at night with a lantern, or at twilight and at dawn; any child knew that.

Nikita began hunting for frogs at night with a lantern, at twilight, at dawn. He became expert at catching them with a net, whispering to himself the name of the species to which he thought his victim belonged as he pursued it. Soon he grew particular, contemptuously dropping the smaller frogs back into the reeds, and keeping only the bigger ones.

Nikita was dissecting a frog of such dimensions and beauty that Fyodor Fyodorovich, approaching him from behind, looked over his shoulder and said to Varya: "There's a well-nourished frog for you!" Nikita had slit open the stomach and extracted a mosquito's wing with a needle. Then a tiny beetle crawled with an exhausted air out of the frog's stomach, perched for a moment on Nikita's hand, opened its wings and sailed away unhurriedly in the direction of the river. Fyodor Fyodorovich followed it with his eyes.

"Leaf-cutter beetle," he said. "Well, you have saved the life of the father of a family, Nikita!"

Nikita allowed himself a smile as he entered on a card that the stomach of a frog of the *nana Ridibunda* species, caught by a certain pond at six p.m., was discovered to contain a live leaf-cutter beetle which instantly flew away. After this he extricated a bee from the frog's stomach.

"Why, it's crammed with bees!" he exclaimed. "Just look, Fyodor Fyodorovich. It's crammed with bees. I never found bees in a frog's stomach before."

"Where did you catch the frog?"

"By the pond. About two kilometres from here."

"Try and catch some more there. An interesting fact, extremely interesting."

"All right." And Nikita began carefully placing the bees on a pad of cotton wool, laying out the abdomens, thoraxes and wings.

"Extremely interesting," repeated Fyodor Fyodorovich as he watched Nikita's hands. "Careful of that wing—you've crumpled it. Next time be so good as to work in the laboratory, this sort of work can't be done out-of-doors. How many have you caught?"

Smothing out the bee's wing, Nikita answered complacently: "Fifty-four."

Fyodor Fyodorovich shot him an approving glance. He had been afraid that Nikita, like so many good field-workers, might turn out a bad laboratory worker. But the patience and carefulness displayed by Nikita in his hunt for frogs' stomachs had reassured him on this point. Nikita satisfied him in all respects but one—his fondness for Alla, a fondness which Fyodor Fyodorovich had noticed for some time. No good would come of it. But since Nikita's feelings did not seem to interfere with his work, the professor decided to reconcile himself to the fact of Alla's existence for the time being.

"A fine fellow," he said to Varya when they were a few steps away from Nikita's open-air laboratory.

"Not bad," Varya answered in a flat voice.

"You're intelligent, no doubt, my dear Varya," Fyodor Fyodorovich said to himself, "but you don't know a thing about people yet. You all fall for gas-bags, but none of you can appreciate a decent, modest man."

Varya had borne the encounter with Nikita bravely enough this time, not even colouring, and actually getting herself to answer Fyodor Fyodorovich with a laconic: "Not bad". She felt that she had at last become a serious individual, mature and well-balanced.

Varya's first year at the university had passed in fits of enthusiasm, self-torture and remorse. The inexorable time-table tossed the students' restless souls from one

world into another, and Varya lost her heart to each subject in turn.

The lecture-hall of the physics department was like a theatre. The long blackboard rose like a curtain, disclosing a bright room with a mysterious apparatus in it. The professor slowly stepped forward, the blackboard descended behind him, and he began immediately to cover it with formulae and figures. When he pronounced certain words, a silent little old man appeared at his side, just like an actor taking his cue, and began illustrating the lecture with demonstrations. All this gave a touch of the dramatic. It took Varya two months to get over the idea that she had wasted her life by not specializing in physics.

Her next passion was medicine, and this had proved still harder to get over. Her work in the dissecting-room showed her that she could make herself dissect corpses. She wanted to be a doctor immediately. She talked it over with Fyodor Fyodorovich, but he answered her curtly: "Give up the idea. I won't let you go." It was a long time, however, before she stopped looking enviously after the swift white ambulance cars. What could be more wonderful than to rush by in a car like this, flying to save a human life? But no one ever thought of arguing with Fyodor Fyodorovich.

Through succeeding infatuations she had been able to bear herself with greater firmness. The lectures on organic chemistry had not awakened the desire to go over to the chemistry faculty; they merely made her wonder if it would not be better for her to become a bio-chemist.

At first Varya tried to conceal her doubts and anxieties from her friends, but she soon realized that only two types of students were immune from them—girls like Alla, who did not care much about their studies anyhow, and whose real life went on outside the university, and people like Nikita, Gromada and Marina Dilmkova, whose

singleness of purpose was such that they had decided on the theme for their diploma work before entering the university.

Nikita had read a paper on the vole before the zoological circle towards the end of his first winter term. Because he passed his examinations before going to the first-year students' summer field-work, he found time to make a journey to a biological station where, according to his excited report, there were "voles galore". Many other students had been swayed in some degree by the same emotions which Varya had experienced. Towards the end of the first year everyone seemed to calm down, but the following autumn, when the students were to be distributed among the departments, their agonies started afresh. Which branch should they choose—physiology, bio-chemistry, histology or something else? Passions raged with especial fierceness around the zoology of vertebrates. Fyodor Fyodorovich's very first lecture won all hearts to his branch of science. He was, moreover, insatiable, and wanted to have all the best students. True, he would occasionally say of some student: "Brilliant, but has more of a bent for physiology." And, in the case of Marina, he had told his plant-physiology colleagues: "Here we have a first-year student who seems to have been made for you. Mind you don't let her go—the bio-chemists might get her!"

Professor Lopatin's firmness of character relieved Varya of some of her anguish in making her choice. He simply enrolled her among his students, and considered the question closed. But her trials were by no means over—she had now to decide on the branch of the speciality to which she would devote her life. Varya had tried to talk it over with Fyodor Fyodorovich, but he only said: "Think for yourself, Varya; never mind if it costs you some sleepless nights. I can't always be making up your mind for you. Go about, poke your nose into things, use your eyes."

Varya went about, poked her nose into things, used her eyes, but could not come to any conclusion. Was it her fault that everything interested her—the development of plumage in birds, the habits of foxes, the breeding of mammals? At last, however, Fyodor Fyodorovich took pity on Varya and suggested that in her spare time she study the fox.

During her two years in the university Varya had learned that the moment one develops a serious interest in a new problem, a host of tantalizing questions is sure to crop up. But she knew next to nothing about foxes, and therefore her serenity was not yet disturbed.

"Have you been looking for fox-holes?" Fyodor Fyodorovich asked.

"I have, Fyodor Fyodorovich. And I've already found one."

"Do you mean the one in the ravine, among the raspberry bushes?" inquired Fyodor Fyodorovich scornfully. "Idiotic hole! Completely exposed. Nobody who passes can help seeing it. Are all three cubs alive?"

"No, there are only two."

"I thought the smallest one would die. He was very delicate. How d'you like the hole, with its two entrances, front and back, eh?"

"The second entrance is in the birch-copse," Varya brought out carelessly, as if she had had no trouble whatever in finding the second entrance, though in reality she had thought at first it led to another hole.

"Clever fox, to dig himself such a hole, wasn't it?"

Something in his tone made Varya suspect a trap, but as she could not discover what it was, she replied briskly: "Of course it was!"

"It must have had a hard time, digging such an enormous hole," continued Fyodor Fyodorovich, now openly derisive. "Such slender pads, fur between the toes. Have you ever seen a fox's prints in winter, Miss Biologist?"

Varya maintained a mortified silence. And she had believed she had discovered a fox-hole the like of which no one had known before!

"The imprint of a fox-pad looks as if someone had passed a paint-brush over it," Fyodor Fyodorovich explained. "The fur keeps the pads warm in winter, but makes digging inconvenient: the earth gets into the fur, and, if damp, sticks to it."

Fyodor Fyodorovich wanted Varya to get at the root of the matter herself. But Varya jogged along by his side in silence. Her fluffy hair streamed behind her like a mane, her eyes were mournful.

Like a colt, thought Fyodor Fyodorovich tenderly. Exactly like a colt.

"The hole belonged to a badger, my dear," he said. "And your fox turned the badger out. Why should it soil its paws? The badgers dug the hole, and then the fox turned them out of it."

"How did it do it?" Varya asked, forgetting her discomfiture in her curiosity.

"You must watch them if you want to see how it was done. I don't know for certain, but this is what people say: the badger is a cleanly animal, and the fox messes up the badger's hole, now fouling it with excrement, now bringing in something nasty, a soiled nag, an empty tin. The badger snorts, and keeps cleaning up the mess, then gives up in despair and abandons the hole. But it's different in this case. The entrance from the raspberry bushes belongs to the fox, the one in the birch-copse to the badger."

"Do you mean to say that they live together?"

"That's what they do. Like a communal apartment. Probably the badgers were induced to give up half of their home. I happened to meet the fox in the birch-copse. It was carrying a crow. A dead one. Quite putrid. All its feathers falling out. The fox held it by the wing with its

teeth, and kept turning its nose away, puckering up its muzzle and even closing its eyes—the fox felt disgusted itself. Anyone would run away from such a crow! Perhaps the fox has managed to drive the badgers away by now. What did you think of the cubs in the hole?"

"Very thin."

"And their fur all rough, I suppose? I should think so. I can imagine what they've made of the hole! Did you look into the hole itself?"

"No."

"You'd better have a look. You needn't be afraid of scaring the cubs off. They're quite big. They probably have ticks in their ears, and the hole must be flea-ridden. No wonder their fur is mangy! This is what I want you to do to-morrow, Varya: take my pump and a couple of packets of DDT," Fyodor Fyodorovich was speaking with relish now (so that's what he went about with the pump for!). "You go there and put things in order. I have no time. There are eight more fox-holes nearby."

The information failed to upset Varya. Now she knew that it was possible to take a plunge into life, to protect and care for wild animals.

"Won't the cubs be poisoned?" she asked.

"No. We've tried all the insecticides. Others are bad for them, but the smell of DDT doesn't frighten away the foxes. Try to get the rubber tube as far in as possible and pump in the powder. All the vermin will die and your fox-cubs will become clean and sweet. Then, Varya, I think they should be fattened up a little. They're quite big already. The poor parents are run off their feet, and the cubs can't get themselves food yet. Are the parents training them?"

"Oh, yes. They brought a jackdaw yesterday to train them with."

Fyodor Fyodorovich shot a kindly glance at Varya. Good girl, she must have sat watching the hole for a long



time. Where did she sit, I wonder? Probably behind that heap of brushwood; you can see everything from there.

Varya was so engrossed in her talk with Fyodor Fyodorovich that she did not notice Yura till they almost stumbled upon him. Things did not seem to be going well with his theme; the chances of finding owls' nests on the river-bank were very slight. Fyodor Fyodorovich regarded Yura with mock astonishment. Somewhat confused, his whole figure expressing extreme preoccupation and exhaustion, Yura informed him that he had been looking for owls' nests all day. There seemed to be a couple with owlets in them, but he could not be sure, for in the daytime they slept, and in the night he couldn't examine them—after all *he* wasn't an owl, *he* couldn't see in the dark. Yura thought he was being very funny, but Fyodor Fyodorovich only glanced at him and remarked that a new subject had been introduced in the literary curriculum—blank verse—and that Yura might do worse than take it up. Varya averted her eyes in horror. She would have died of shame if Fyodor Fyodorovich had spoken to her like that.

"And yet," continued Fyodor Fyodorovich ruthlessly, "poetry requires thought. Perhaps you ought to go in for ballet-dancing, as supporting partner?"

Never before had Fyodor Fyodorovich advised a student to go in for ballet-dancing. Yura flushed crimson and made for the woods with the obvious intention of looking for owls' nests.

Varya was longing to put in a word for him, but apparently Fyodor Fyodorovich attributed no importance whatever to the unfortunate occurrence, and went on as if nothing had happened:

"So you'll feed the fox-cubs, Varya, won't you? I'm taking you to the kolkhoz specially to get some meat for them. We'll arrange it so that you'll be able to go there for it the day after to-morrow. You'll see how the foxes

and their coats will respond to your efforts! All hunters will thank you."

But Fyodor Fyodorovich suddenly bethought himself that there were very few real hunters in the district; most of them were amateurs. It was too near town. Two years previously, when he was in Siberia, he had managed to persuade the hunters to feed the foxes and disinfect their holes. There, in the taiga, the hunters are in earnest. They have to be. Everything needs looking after. Foresters take care of every tree in their wood. And animals need just as much care.

At first the hunters had looked at him askance, but gradually they were won over. And now they delivered pelts without a blemish. And the great thing was that the foxes themselves, used to being fed by the hunters, came half-way, so to speak, to meet them. It's not much trouble, after all, to take a pump, a few packets of DDT and a bit of meat with you when you're going into the woods.

"They'll soon get used to you, Varya," he said. "And I want you to collect all the muck you find in the hole—all the fleas and ticks—in test-tubes, and take them to the entomologist. Ask him to give you what data he has on fox-parasites. Boris Arkadyevich will be glad to help you. Do you know him?"

Varya almost choked with joy. For it was precisely in Boris Arkadyevich's laboratory that Nikita was to work. Parasites were what she would study. And she would start as soon as possible—to-morrow! She would collect plenty of ticks and fleas, and spend evenings on end in the laboratory. She would not speak to Nikita, just sit and work beside him. It would be so wonderful to see his absorbed face and his skilful hands as she sat beside him doing her own very important and necessary work. There would be no Alla in the laboratory. Her group was studying botany. Botany was no doubt a highly commendable science, but somehow it did not attract Varya. You

can't talk to grass, or stroke it. Foxes are different. No, no, *she* could not devote her life to grass. "And while you're about it, Varya, try to find out if foxes eat grass," said Fyodor Fyodorovich. "And if they do—why. Perhaps they take it as medicine. Go to the botanists and make a close study of the grasses eaten by foxes."

Varya nodded submissively, and Fyodor Fyodorovich went on:

"Next term you will begin to study bio-chemistry. Professor Petrov, a brilliant man, is the lecturer. I'll introduce you to him. Study the chemistry of hair, its pigmentation—an extremely interesting branch of science. Not much research has been done in it. What affects pigmentation, and so on. What marks did you get for chemistry?"

"Inorganic chemistry, four; organic, five."

"And physics?"

"Three," was the rueful reply.

"That won't do—a biologist must be well up in subjects like physics, chemistry and geology. You know very well we cannot work in isolation from one another. There are people working on my themes in every department; I don't leave anyone in peace," said Fyodor Fyodorovich avidly. "First I go up to a person; he tells me about his work; I tell him about mine. I get him interested in some theme of mine, and, after more talk, lo and behold, he's all afire! And he takes up my theme, a theme I am burning to have worked out. Thus, by our joint efforts we clear up a point or two. Now, for instance, histologists are very useful people for us. You have a bright girl in the histology department: Nina. Try to interest her in the hair structure of animals. Let her study it—look, there goes a fox!"

Fyodor Fyodorovich strained his eyes, keen as those of an old bird, into the distance.

But though she tried hard, Varya was unable to see any fox.

"Gone!" said Fyodor Fyodorovich.

Varya heaved a deep sigh. Her serenity was shattered. The fox-theme had split up into agonizing problems—physics, chemistry, histology, DDT. A fine animal breeder she would make! And a fox had passed by without her even noticing it!

"Now Varya, don't start tormenting yourself," said Fyodor Fyodorovich kindly. "Or rather, do, by all means, there can be no progress without that. But try not to do it *all* the time. Make up your mind what problem to choose, and work it out calmly, develop it, expand it. Work by yourself, but consult others. Think out a new approach; don't cling blindly to accepted opinions. When you have solved one agonizing problem, ten other agonizing problems will arise from it. Let them torment you for a bit, then tackle the one you consider the most important, and go ahead."

Fyodor Fyodorovich paused, and then added:

"Above all, Varya, don't forget how rich we are and what possibilities we have. Not so long ago I made the acquaintance of an English millionaire who bred beavers on his estate. He was sitting opposite me and I could read his thoughts: 'Poor chap,' he was thinking, 'you probably have no land of your own!' And what would I need an estate for, when all the woods in the land belong to me? Farming on a small scale is a thing of the past with us."

Fyodor Fyodorovich plumped down on the grass growing at the side of the road, drew out a map, and spread it before Varya.

"This is our 'estate', Varya," he said, and swept his sunburnt hand over the whole map. "A hundred, two hundred, three hundred lakes—all yours for the asking. *Our* rivers, *our* lakes, *our* woods. All ours. All mine. Go

to a shop and try to buy a beaver-skin. None to be had, except old ones. Those are the orders. We are breeding beavers. Beavers are being carried about like infants in arms, from one end of the country to another. We are selecting suitable rivers and lakes for them. When we have bred enough, things will change. Then we'll clothe as many people in beaver as we like; first, perhaps, the flyers, so that they won't feel cold as they soar up into the stratosphere, or to the moon, for that matter. Then our explorers. Let them be warm wherever they go. And then we'll clothe you girls. Now, in the cold weather, you all rush to the warm Metro in your light coats. But when you are all dressed in furs, you'll step out sedately, the frost only giving a glow to your cheeks, making you prettier than ever. Beaver is too heavy for you, however, though it's a thick, warm, handsome fur. You must wear sables. A light, graceful fur; it will give you a light, graceful step."

Varya listened with bated breath. Nothing was left of her harassed feelings, and a new delightful feeling took their place—love for her work. Her arduous, anxious, delightful, ever forward-marching work.

CHAPTER 7

In his joy at seeing Professor Lopatin, Zakhar Petrovich, chairman of The Streams Kolkhoz, threw his arms round him. He shook hands warmly with Varya, and, on hearing what she had come for, arranged for her to get a supply of oil. Varya left at once on her errand.

Zakhar Petrovich cordially invited the professor to join him at table, and Fyodor Fyodorovich suddenly realized that he was extremely hungry. He had not had proper food for almost a week, and he somehow never found time even to make tea for himself. When he reached home

at night he usually felt so sleepy that he told himself: "Never mind, I'll have tea to-morrow," and in the morning he could not bear to waste time making tea when the forest was just waking up.

But no, it had not been a whole week. One day Nikita had appeared in his room with a dozen baked potatoes, straight from the embers, and a smoked fish, split open in the best practical-zoology style. These he had placed on the table between the partly stuffed carcass of a thrush and a jar containing a frog with a slit abdomen. Nikita had sat on the side of the bed, smilingly watching Fyodor Fyodorovich devour the food. When Fyodor Fyodorovich had finished eating, Nikita had gathered up the potato-peelings and fish-bones, and left. Ah, those potatoes had been good!

But Zakhar Petrovich's meat was good, too. And these gherkins! Fyodor Fyodorovich crunched a gherkin with gusto.

When Fyodor Fyodorovich had satisfied his hunger, the two friends settled down to a session of tea, tobacco and talk. They talked unhurriedly, methodically dealing with each subject in turn.

"By the way," exclaimed Fyodor Fyodorovich suddenly, "what did you mean by that telegram you sent me? It didn't sound like you at all. Quite hysterical."

"Give him a piece of your mind for that telegram," a voice joined in from the doorway. "He got himself into a mess and now he doesn't know how to get out of it."

The chairman turned indignantly towards the door where Zakhar Vasilievich, Secretary of the kolkhoz Party organization, was standing. They had had a quarrel about the very thing which had induced the chairman to send a telegram to Lopatin.

The chairman was not accustomed to quarrelling with Zakhar Vasilievich. He had known Zakhar Vasilievich from the time when his own staggering footsteps had

taken him uncertainly from the door of his house to the garden-gate. On the other side of the fence was the house in which, a year earlier, Zakhar Vasilievich had been born. They had made each other's acquaintance at the garden-gate. And from then on, as it seemed to Zakhar Petrovich, he had always had Zakhar Vasilievich at his side. They were collectively alluded to as "the Zakhars". "The Zakhars are coming". "The Zakhars say". And when they grew up to years of discretion they were known by their patronymics—Petrovich and Vasilievich.

Gradually, as the years accumulated, they even grew subtly like one another, as often happens with people who have lived long side by side. But their natures were very different. Zakhar Petrovich was impulsive, hot-tempered, with facile enthusiasms that sometimes died out quickly. Zakhar Vasilievich was more reserved, more taciturn, and, since his first childish enthusiasm for gardening, was still, at the age of fifty, cultivating orchards. And what orchards!

The difference in their natures, however, was not the least obstacle to their friendship. They had spent their whole lives together. They had gone to school together, fought for the Revolution together, joined the Party together, and together had fought the kulaks and formed the kolkhoz. When the war broke out they had been separated. Zakhar Vasilievich had gone into the army, but Zakhar Petrovich had not been accepted, having been severely wounded in the spine during the Civil War. Zakhar Petrovich missed his friend sorely, but nowhere so much as in the partisan brigade. And he had found it difficult, on returning to The Streams, to restore the kolkhoz without Zakhar Vasilievich. Both he and the collective farm needed this man. The brief letters received from him by Zakhar Petrovich were a comfort—his friend had fought well and had got right to Berlin. When Zakhar Vasilievich came back from the front he was again elected Secretary of the Party organization and once again

the friends worked together. They often argued, but their arguments always ended in their coming to a common decision.

But this time the longer they argued the deeper and graver became the difference between them.

The affair of the animal farm started at a Komsomol meeting held in March. The chairman of the kolkhoz asked for permission to address the meeting, and said:

"I've come to talk business with you, youngsters."

Everybody was instantly on the alert. It must be something new and entirely unexpected. Something Zakhar Petrovich would not yet venture to suggest to the adult members of the kolkhoz.

Alexei Vyushkov, Secretary of the Komsomol organization, invited Zakhar Petrovich to sit down and moved the ash-tray towards him. There was a scraping of chairs as the young people drew nearer to the chairman.

"It's a profitable business, and..." Zakhar Petrovich paused as he rolled himself a cigarette and slowly licked the paper, "—and, between you and me, a very interesting one," he concluded.

"What is it?" asked Anna Yasnova impatiently.

But the chairman did not answer her. He liked keeping his audience in suspense.

"I was at The Dawn Kolkhoz yesterday," he began, "and what I saw at that kolkhoz made me envious. We're behind the times, Comrades."

He paused to savour the faint murmur of indignation which rippled over the audience.

"Other kolkhozes have had the enterprise to strike out on new lines. Very profitable ones. And we are asleep. I was so unhappy and upset, that The Dawn chairman gave me a present to cheer me up."

"A present?" Alexei echoed incredulously. It was no more like The Dawn chairman to make presents than it was like Zakhar Petrovich himself.

"Yes, a present. For cash, of course. But a present that is not always to be got for money, let me tell you."

Having worked the meeting up to a peak of curiosity, the chairman fell silent again. He liked to be bombarded with questions, for this heightened the effect of what he had to impart. But the youngsters were hurt—they did not enjoy being teased. So they, too, held their tongues, and their silence won the day. "He gave me a fox, Comrades," Zakhar Petrovich announced at last.

"A what?" asked Dusya sceptically.

"A fox. A silver fox. A pedigreed sire. I've seen it. A beauty. Fur like silver."

"They have an animal farm, but what do *we* want a fox for?" Alexei asked.

"And why can't *we* have an animal farm?" retorted the chairman. "Aren't we as good as The Dawn?"

Alexei could see that the chairman was excited, as he always was when a new idea took possession of him. The thought of having an animal farm appealed to Alexei, too, but it seemed a very complicated business to tackle.

"New people will be needed, Zakhar Petrovich—specialists," he said softly.

"And can't we find them? What's wrong with our own people?"

"The Dawn sent for a specialist on fur-farming."

"We could send for one, too," said Klava.

"Of course we could," assented the chairman, "but I prefer to train people on the spot. We could get an expert, of course, but he'd be a town-bred man. And why do I say he is sure to be a town-bred man? Because when a kolkhoz member graduates he goes back to his own village. And the town chap will stay only three years, and we'll never see him again. The Dawn had luck with theirs. The specialist turned out to be an unmarried girl. And their teacher happened to be a good-looking lad."

"So the specialist married him," Dusya corroborated.

"Yes," continued the chairman. "But suppose she hadn't? It's no good, we must train our own specialists. Here we have our homes, our families, our roots, our all. This is what we'll do: send one of you to a study course, to learn the job in six months, and send another to the Fur Institute. By the time we get our animal farm going we will have our own specialists, armed with diplomas. In the meantime we can consult The Dawn specialist. Who shall we send to study?"

"Hadn't we better let our people get used to the idea before we decide?" ventured Alexei.

"Foxes bite, don't they?" remarked Dusya.

"Very likely. Well, you can make your minds up later. This is what I suggest doing now: make cages. Take the fox from The Dawn. Place an order with a state nursery for five silver-fox vixens. And start little by little, but energetically enough to enable us to overtake The Dawn in two years."

"But what do we gain by it?" asked the practical Dusya. "I can imagine what the outlay will be. But the gain?"

"Gain!" echoed the chairman. "What is our position as regards meat, my dear Dusya? Excellent, isn't it? We give the state the required quantity of meat, we eat meat ourselves, and there's always plenty of offal left over. Right? We can't use all the offal we have, and it won't keep. Now what's a fox? A fox means fur, fur means export, export means gold resources for the state. Even in inexperienced hands foxes breed well. The fur keeps well, ships well. Isn't that so? Therefore I propose investing our surplus offal in foxes, as well as in pigs. Profitable and pleasant. That's all I have to say."

The chairman cast a glance over the meeting. He could not as yet make out how his suggestion was being received.

"It'll be sad—to raise them just to kill them," piped up Anna.

"Sad! We kill our pigs, don't we?"

"Where will we build the kennels, Zakhar Petrovich?" Alexei asked in business-like tones.

His eyes softening, Zakhar Petrovich once more looked at the faces before him. They were a fine lot, these youngsters of his! Give them an idea, and they jump at it. And once their enthusiasm is aroused, they will be ready to go without sleep or food to make the project a success.

Next day the Komsomol Committee met and resolved, in view of the fact that they had neither kennels nor specialists yet, to entrust the "gift" fox to Anna Yasnova, as a Komsomol task.

In a month's time the present arrived from The Dawn.

The pedigreed sire turned out to be a small fox with a narrow head and slanting yellow eyes. It being spring, the fox was shedding its coat, the rusty hair coming out in tufts, and the pitiful-looking brush trailing. The huge cage they had built made the fox look very small and solitary. Ignoring the shouts of the children crowding round the cage, it busily sniffed its new home all over.

"Call that a fox? More like a plucked chicken!" the children yelled.

The fox pounced on a bit of meat and dragged it towards the shelter at the back of the cage.

In the winter, when the chairman had seen it, it might have been a good-looking fox, but Anna was ready to suspect The Dawn of having sent them a second-rate animal. She re-read the pedigree suspiciously.

"Never mind, he's a fine little fellow," she said, trying to console herself, and she shouted to the children to stop their noise. But the fox must have been accustomed to human beings, for it showed no sign of fear.

Things went from bad to worse. The state nursery did not send them any foxes, but informed Zakhar Petrovich

that all the vixens for sale had been distributed already, and that his kolkhoz was listed for next year. In his distress the chairman sent a telegram to Professor Lopatin, who was adviser to the Fur Institute. But Fyodor Fyodorovich was in Yakutia attending the Hunters' and Animal Breeders' Congress at the time, and the telegram was not forwarded to him.

So the fox continued to live in single blessedness. At last the chairman got a wire from Fyodor Fyodorovich: "Look before leap stop meanwhile cross silver fox with local red vixen stop will advise regarding fur-farm summer Lopatin."

Somewhat cheered, the chairman went to Kuzmich, the forester, and asked him to catch a vixen alive, an ordinary red vixen, for breeding purposes.

"A red vixen? Other kolkhozes breed silver foxes," Kuzmich answered disdainfully. "All sorts of fur-bearing animals are bred—mink, sable and so on. But when foxes are bred, they must be silver foxes."

Zakhar Petrovich listened patiently to all Kuzmich had to say, and then politely repeated his request.

"We'll breed silver foxes later on. We just want to get our hand in."

Kuzmich maintained a disapproving silence.

"Of course, I understand," the chairman threw out diplomatically. "It must be very hard to catch a fox alive. If you can't, perhaps some other hunter..."

Three days later Kuzmich brought a vixen. He unfastened the neck of the sack, deftly caught the fox by the brush, and swung it into the cage. It was a red vixen, bigger and older than the silver fox, the streaks of grey on her mask giving her a rather sophisticated look. When the male ran up, she snarled at him and ran to hide in the shelter.

"Your young man will have a time of it with that vixen," scoffed Kuzmich as he watched the fox circle anx-

iously round the shelter, from which menacing barks could be heard.

"However did you manage to catch her?" said Anna coaxingly, impressed by the ferociousness of the vixen and the ease with which Kuzmich had pulled it out of the sack by the brush.

Kuzmich shrugged his shoulders. "What's a fox?" he said. "I know some people living on the River Amur, a father and four sons; I used to catch tigers alive with them. That's what I call hunting. Well, good luck to you."

And Kuzmich walked slowly away from the cage, swinging the empty sack with a fine show of nonchalance.

The foxes seemed to have not the slightest intention of encumbering their carefree lives with the troubles involved in the propagation of their kind. The mating periods expired again and again, and the vixen still went about thin and shaggy, showing by her whole demeanour that no cubs were to be expected from her.

Zakhar Petrovich stopped mentioning animal-farming; he even tried to pretend that he had never been interested in it. But one day the inexorable Zakhar Vasilievich asked him point-blank what he meant to do about it. Stirring up the youngsters, and then doing nothing, was the way to lose their confidence.

Naturally enough, Zakhar Petrovich was disinclined to resume the fur-farm quarrel in front of Fyodor Fyodorovich, of all people. But Zakhar Vasilievich was determined to draw Professor Lopatin into the argument. Dropping into a seat by the table, he listened with a show of grave attention to the somewhat incoherent words of the chairman.

"Did you expect," began Lopatin angrily, when the chairman stopped talking, "that people would sit and wait for The Streams Kolkhoz to start an animal farm? Foxes sell like hot cakes now. Would you like to see how much money was made in Yakutia on foxes? Look at this."

Fumbling in his pockets, the professor extracted a piece of paper. The chairman glanced at it out of the corner of his eye: the columns on it all ran into six figures—hundreds of thousands of rubles against the names of separate kolkhozes. Professor Lopatin watched the expression of his face with malicious pleasure.

"I intend to go in for this seriously," the chairman brought out at last.

"Then use your brains. We'll find a suitable place, the right people, get the animals, and I'll have a zoologist trained for you this winter. I'll select the foxes for you myself. Silver ones. And later on it won't be only foxes—there'll be minks, sables, anything you like."

"To my way of thinking, we don't need a fur-farm on our kolkhoz," interrupted Zakhar Vasilievich.

Fyodor Fyodorovich looked at him in bewilderment.

"We don't," Zakhar Vasilievich insisted. "Why should we take the trouble when everything has been started next door, at The Dawn? They've found a suitable place, they have experienced specialists. I think there would be more sense in joining forces with them and developing the business together. What d'you say?"

"That's an idea!" Fyodor Fyodorovich brightened up and turned to the chairman for his approval. But he did not meet with any.

"A bad idea," frowned Zakhar Petrovich. "Why on earth should I join forces with The Dawn?"

"Hold on!" broke in Fyodor Fyodorovich. "I think you're wrong there. There really isn't much sense in starting the whole thing all over again. I've heard of The Dawn animal farm; they say it's very well managed. And you have wonderful resources. You just haven't taken advantage of them, so far. There's a small lake not far from your kolkhoz. It would do beautifully for raising water animals."

"What kind?"

"The rodents from whose pelts nutria is made, for instance. I've had my eye on that lake for years. It seems to have no owner, and I have no idea whom to approach about it. It doesn't belong to The Streams. The Dawn has no use for it. It's a very small lake, overgrown with reeds and rushes, of no interest to anyone. Take it upon yourself to organize a fur-farm there on a large scale. You could try foxes, rodents and even beavers."

"That's what I keep telling him," broke in Zakhar Vasilievich enthusiastically, "and it's not a question of just an animal farm. Look at our orchard! Our orchard is very favourably situated. We could raise grapes. But, no! It lies just next to a field belonging to The Dawn Kolkhoz. Our two chairmen think of nothing but outdoing each other; neither of them has the slightest inclination to co-operate. If our Zakhar Petrovich were easier to get on with, we could come to some arrangement with them. There would be more scope for the orchard, and we could let The Dawn have a place to grow their vegetables. They have fine vegetable gardens. But they're cramped. There's another little kolkhoz over the river, quite near. It should be joined on, too."

"A fine kolkhoz—seventeen families!" sneered Zakhar Petrovich.

"So you think it's a poor kolkhoz?" Zakhar Vasilievich demanded.

"Worse than poor."

"And d'you think, Chairman, that the Soviet state has need of poor kolkhozes?"

"Why d'you ask me idiotic questions?" Zakhar Petrovich was angry. "Who do you think you're talking to?"

"I'm talking to Zakhar Petrovich, chairman of The Streams Kolkhoz, member of the Party," answered Zakhar Vasilievich coldly. "And Zakhar Petrovich is apparently lazy and selfish. He has put his own kolkhoz on its feet. He raises pigs. He has started a stud-farm. Planted

an orchard. Put up a power station. And now he thinks he can sit back and say: 'All this is mine. Why should I help a weaker kolkhoz? It would mean training their people, sharing money, grain and electric power with them.' And he grudges all that. He doesn't want to do anything. He doesn't need their help. His kolkhoz is rich enough, isn't it?"

"Would you say we were poor?"

"I would," said Zakhar Vasilievich imperturbably. "Our roads are bad, the club is much too small. You go about in a horse-drawn cart, Zakhar Petrovich. Of course, Ribka is a nice hack, but wouldn't you rather drive in a car? I've been looking at some plants, very interesting ones, but we can't buy them—our kolkhoz is too poor. Why shouldn't you work on a larger scale? Afraid you won't be able to cope with it? Not enough experience, eh?"

"Perhaps that's it. Who knows?"

"If it is, we can elect another chairman. They have quite an efficient chairman at The Dawn."

"None of your insinuations! I can't tackle everything at once."

"Of course you can't. That's just what I was saying. That is, if you insist on rivalry. But if you would only co-operate, we'd perform feats you never dreamed of. You want an animal farm, don't you? You're dying to have one, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am."

"What sort of animal farm do you want—a private one? Named after Zakhar Petrovich Balashov? Your own foxes. Silver foxes. To make furs for your wife, eh?"

"That's enough, Zakhar. I want a *kolkhoz* animal farm."

"Ah, so it's for the kolkhoz you want it? That's right. For The Streams. Because you think of The Streams as

your kolkhoz. What about trying to think of The Dawn in the same way? You'd have your own animal farm on your own property. You can develop it, improve it, work in it to your heart's content. You can even transfer your red vixen there, as a souvenir."

Zakhar Petrovich thought of answering him. But his opponents were too many for him, so he preferred to limit himself to an indifferent: "Well, we can think it over. See if things fit...."

"Wouldn't it be splendid, though?" Fyodor Fyodorovich said wistfully. "And you must begin raising nutria, you know...."

Lopatin intercepted the almost imploring glance of the chairman. "I see I was in the wrong," the glance said. "What more do you want?"

Lopatin chuckled softly. "Zakhar Petrovich can't bear to be in the wrong." He made up his mind to take pity on his old friend, and reserve his scolding till he got him alone; and now he would touch upon a theme which the chairman would like. There were many amount of such themes—a ten-year school, a power station, horses, orchards, and a brickworks. But Lopatin was well aware that nothing would delight the chairman's heart more than a discussion of pig-raising.

This subject had received much attention before the war. Academician Petrov had been experimenting on new home-grown breeds, and had tested the results of his experiments not only at state farms and breeding centres, but also on collective farms where work was well organized. The piggeries at The Streams had been one of the academician's best laboratories. The famous champion, Daisy No. 31, had been produced there from the family of "White Daisies". It had only been possible to save a few of the most valuable animals during the war, among which were Daisy No. 31, and Buyan, a young boar of great promise. The latter had been Zakhar Petrovich's

especial care. "A good boar is worth half the herd," he was fond of saying. The German invaders, after a brief orgy of pork dinners, rapidly recovered their senses and dispatched many of the best animals to their homeland. Despite his indignation, Zakhar Petrovich could not but feel a certain elation.

"That shows," he would say, "that their pigs can't stand up to ours."

As soon as he returned to the kolkhoz after its emancipation, the chairman busied himself with the piggery. There were some who tried to persuade him to put up a primitive wooden shed, with no new-fangled improvements. But the chairman was firm.

"Now that the war is over, it is our duty to build in a solid way," he said. "There aren't going to be any more sheds and shelters. We'll have only parquet or cement floors. Everything strictly scientific. This was the last war. And I don't intend putting up wooden buildings—nothing but brick."

By the time the new farm was built new people had grown up, too—Alexei Vyushkov, whom the chairman could remember as an infant. Alexei had come back to the collective farm as a zootechnician, and Anna Yasnova, at first taken on to help with the pigs, had become the manager of the piggery in two years. The young people took up the work with zeal, and in three years' time there was a new celebrity at the farm—Astra, grand-daughter of Daisy No. 31. Astra weighed two hundred and ninety kilogrammes and her first litter contained twenty piglets. To the anguish of Anna Yasnova, the implacable Zakhar Petrovich and Alexei condemned three-quarters of the litter.

"Do look at this one!" she begged. "Look how round and plump it is!"

"It gives no promise as a sire," objected the chairman. And the youthful zoologist upheld him.

"Your plump darlings are no good, Anna. Just look at them! Short legs, lazy, sleepy, not playful, put on fat quickly. These are the true *élite*—look how big and bony they are! They are the proper founders of a family."

Zakhar Petrovich kept the carefully selected best piglets under his personal observation. He even went so far as to boast that these piglets, bred this time not from Buyan, but from the celebrated boar Kamish, represented a new breed. He prophesied a remarkable future for them. Zakhar Petrovich considered that this breed was ideal in this district. It matured rapidly and was very prolific. When Astra herself farrowed, Zakhar Petrovich worked Anna Yasnova mercilessly.

Lopatin, of course, knew all about this. And he knew that a discussion of pigs would distract Zakhar Petrovich from the unpleasant subject of the fox-farm. To his astonishment, however, Zakhar Petrovich's face clouded over. Lopatin turned to Zakhar Vasilievich: could it be that the Zakhars had quarrelled on this subject, too? But the Party Secretary seemed as unhappy as the chairman.

"Things are bad," at last brought out Zakhar Petrovich. "Orders have been received not to develop new breeds; it's beyond us mere mortals. They've sent me a boar that's to be used as sire for all time. It's a good boar, no denying that, but conditions here won't do for its descendants—the climate's wrong, and the fodder's wrong. A good breeder, they say. I don't doubt that in three years' time his offspring will be all over the place. But why should the district veterinary inspector insist on my slaughtering Kamish and all his offspring?"

"Something's wrong in your field, Professor," put in Zakhar Vasilievich. "You seem to have overlooked something. The deeper you delve into science, the further you are from reality. We had a consultant from the

stock-breeding institute; he told us all about the laws of genetics, but our horses and cows and pigs don't seem to want to obey those laws. I've been in correspondence with Vasili Vasilievich Sumarev. Know him?"

"Of course I do, he's a follower of Michurin," said Lopatin.

"He helped me a lot," went on Zakhar Vasilievich. "Thanks to him I started growing grapes. I have any number of Michurin sorts in my vineyard. And the other day I got my letter back, with the words: 'Sumarev has been dismissed' on the envelope! On the envelope! Did you ever hear anything like it? For everybody to read. And I needed his reply badly. I sent a telegram to ask where he was. No answer as yet. He's simply disappeared from view. I applied to your university, and to the Botanical Gardens, for advice. They told me it was no good trying to raise grapes in our district, that I should go back to apple-growing. So our grapes must perish. Humph! There must be something wrong with your science. It's not for us to say what, of course. You are all estimable, honourable, learned men, but we, the people, need advice and practical aid."

"I wrote to the university, too," said the chairman. "About those pigs of ours. I'm waiting for an answer. The district inspector told me if I didn't trust him I could apply to the greatest specialist in that line—Professor Shumsky. Do you know him?"

"Oh, yes," said Lopatin, as indifferently as possible.

"You can see at once he's a cultivated man, a serious man. He answered the next day, very polite and cordial. 'I intend to visit you as soon as possible, and hope we shall be able to help you with your problem.' There's a man for you!"

Lopatin beamed.

"You have no idea what good news you've given me, Zakhar!"

Zakhar Petrovich, though he did not quite understand what Lopatin was so pleased about, hastened to agree with him.

"It *is* good news, isn't it? So I'm expecting him. He'll come here and take my side, and before you know it you'll be congratulating me on new champions." The chairman suddenly bethought himself of the laws of hospitality, and enquired after his visitor's affairs: "Well, Professor, and how are things with you? How's everything at the biological station? Why did you sack Kuzmich? What were you thinking of, to do a thing like that?"

Lopatin told them eagerly what was going on at the biological station. The Zakhars listened to him attentively, and then proposed a united plan of action:

"Let the biological station give us some students to help the kolkhoz with its mowing. And the kolkhoz will send a brigade of carpenters to put things in order at the biological station."

The chairman was in a hurry to get the mowing over, since in his opinion heavy rains were soon to be expected. This caused Lopatin great uneasiness. In the present state of the biological station rain would be a real catastrophe. The living quarters of the students leaked like a sieve. When students came back from early morning expeditions in the forest, their feet were always soaked in dew. And there was nowhere to dry their boots. It could not be done in the kitchen, where meals were cooked. The students would catch cold. And there was no nurse. And no medicine either.

The friendly proposal of the Zakhars had a soothing effect on Lopatin. Zakhar Vasilievich soon left them, and Lopatin and Zakhar Petrovich sat for a long time smoking and drinking tea, so that when Lopatin got to the biological station it was already light.

CHAPTER 8

Professor Sharov sent Varya Berezhkova to Moscow with a message to the dean. Varya left about five in the morning so as to be able to cover the 20 kilometres to the station at a leisurely pace and catch the ten-o'clock train. It was cool and still, and the larks soared high over the fields on both sides of the road. Varya walked unhurriedly, humming as she went. She had not wanted to go to town. She hated leaving the biological station. Besides, the idea of the impending talk with the dean worried her.

Sharov had decided to send Varya because he had been told she was both reliable and assertive. It was not a very exact description of her character, for, far from being assertive, Varya suffered from excessive shyness.

In her early days at the university she had passed almost unnoticed; she was just a quiet, slight little thing with fair, fluffy hair and candid grey eyes.

Appraising her with the eye of an experienced Komsomol worker, Lyuba had said: "Not a bad girl, but she'll never gain any prestige—too quiet."

And what Lyuba said carried weight. Lyuba was elected Komsomol Organizer for their year at the first meeting. She herself was not surprised at this. She had long grown used to hearing it said of her "Lyuba demands", instead of "Lyuba requests". The eldest of a large family, she had reigned supreme over her sisters and brothers, and after three years of school she considered herself a full-fledged social worker. She had acquired a rather peremptory tone, knew how to organize the other children, how to distribute tasks among them and see that they were carried out properly.

And so, when she gave such a decided summing-up of Varya at the students' meeting, Varya was not given any social task. But Varya had been a member of the Young Pioneers' Council in the children's home where she had

grown up, and during her last year there she had been elected to the Komsomol Bureau. When she first entered the university she had not missed social duties, being too deeply absorbed in her studies. She was stirred by the university's ancient walls and vaulted ceilings, by the lecture-rooms, each of which was a cherished memorial of Russian history, by the very paving-stones over which had stepped people who had become the pride and glory of Russia—Griboyedov, Lermontov, Herzen, Belinsky, Pirogov, Sechenov, Timiryazev....

Alla Irtishova was elected Komsomol Organizer for Group 3 in the first year. By the end of the first three days of the term everybody knew her. It would have been impossible not to notice her. Her hair was so golden, her black eyes were so merry, her teeth so white and her cheeks so rosy, that no one who saw her could help giving her another look. Very soon she knew everyone, and had invited a great many of them to her home, to celebrate their entry into the university. The spacious flat was cheerful and cosy. Alla's mother, Klavdia Nikolayevna, had arranged a delicious supper for the students. Alla played the piano, sang, danced indefatigably, and pressed her friends to eat. Her laughter was so infectious that even that taciturn Siberian, Stepan Poroshin, could not withstand it, and smiled sheepishly in his beard the whole evening. Alla lent books to all her visitors, and she had any amount of books, all of them interesting; she introduced the students to her friends—people who could recite poetry and dance, not like the university "bears", as Alla said teasingly. Then everybody was entertained by the television set, which was at that time still a novelty. The set was a present to Alla's father, a famous aviation constructor, from one of his pupils, a young engineer whom Alla declared to be ever so nice and amusing, but who unfortunately had been unable to come that evening, as he worked on the night shift.

Alla made a speech at the first Komsomol meeting of the university. She spoke easily, confidently, and with humour. Her speech was liked, and when the Bureau proposed her as Organizer for her group, everybody approved.

"She has a feeling for the collective," said Lyuba.

"Oh, no I haven't," laughed Alla. "I never had important tasks at school. Only in the dramatic and singing circles."

"Why was that?" questioned Lyuba sternly.

"I suppose," replied Alla frankly, "they all knew I wasn't very serious-minded."

Lyuba was indignant.

"They just didn't know how to manage people in your school."

And so Alla Irtishova became Komsomol Organizer. She showed herself to be a good comrade in adversity as well as in prosperity. When Zina Rizhikova's mother fell ill, Alla immediately took her some marvellous medicine, and a little later Alla's mother went to see Zina, leaving a kind note, some lemons, some cakes made by Alla, and notes of the lectures Zina had missed. They were not Alla's notes, by the way; she had taken them from Nikita Orekhov and Marina Dinkova.

Alla made an extremely indulgent Komsomol Organizer. She was always ready to look the other way when members of her group missed lectures or, huddling together like school children on the highest benches of the amphitheatre, filled in cross-word puzzles. More, Alla herself was fond of joining them in this, or of missing a lecture for the sake of a concert. She took it very calmly when the wall-newspaper was a fortnight late, or three girls from her group failed to hand in their physics notebooks in time.

The monitor was one of her friends, and although Group 3 was known as the jolliest in the year, matters

went from bad to worse. When Lyuba reproached Alla for this at meetings of the Bureau, Alla merely narrowed her eyes and tried to make out that after all there was nothing so very terrible about it. Even Lyuba gave in in the face of such convincing and good-humoured frivolity. Nikita made several attempts to have a serious talk with Alla, but she only made fun of him, saying he was a model student, and she was just an ordinary girl and couldn't sit the whole evening, like Marina Dimkova, in the plant-physiology room and read nothing but Timiryazev. She preferred Chekhov and Maupassant. Alla would tease him, and then complain to the other girls about him. Her friends always stuck up for her. This was just what Nikita could not bear, and he would retreat glumly while the girls shouted after him in mocking chorus.

In three months' time anyone could see that the group had become split in two. On one side were Alla and her twittering girl friends (Katya Belkina called them the "hen-coop"). On the other were Katya, Nikita, Marina Dimkova, Stepan, and the retiring Varya Berezhkova. Katya, too, tried talking to Alla, who, however, did not listen to her very attentively, though she was perfectly polite and tolerant. Katya was a Party member already, and during the war had joined a partisan brigade near Kursk, her native town.

There was another factor working against harmony in the group: the girls and boys were not accustomed to studying side by side. They were used to attending separate schools, meeting only at inter-school parties, where the boys leaned dejectedly against the wall, horribly embarrassed by the disdainful girls. Nikita could not understand this. He had grown up in the country, where girls and boys went to the same school, worked together on the farm, studied in the same circles, went through the agonies of examinations together.

True, Nikita noticed that it was only Alla and her

set who, on seeing a boy enter the laboratory, would stop work and begin laughing and talking in unnatural voices when, as far as he could see, there was nothing to laugh about. Other girls would remain calm and unruffled even though they, too, had studied in girls' schools.

At the opening of the second year, Zina had suggested letting Alla continue as Komsomol Organizer. Alla, she insisted, was a "good comrade"—hallowed phrase which usually has a magical effect upon a collective made up of young people. Alla's friends clapped, and the question seemed to have been settled, when suddenly Nikita got up. Although well aware that it would lead to a quarrel with Alla, he said: "We must elect a new Komsomol Organizer. Alla has shown herself incapable of coping with the job." And he proposed Marina's name. It never occurred to him to mention Varya, with whom he had hardly exchanged a word the whole year.

"Well, girls, your easy life has come to an end," said Alla with a laugh which was not quite sincere.

One of the girls sighed. There was nothing to be said against the suggestion, but one thing was clear—the easy life of the group really had come to an end.

Alla had once said to Marina, somewhat sarcastically: "Whenever I look at you I realize how imperfect the rest of humanity is."

Marina had smiled her tranquil smile. She did not catch the sarcasm. Marina could sing, play the piano and laugh, and all much better than Alla could, only she did it less often. She and her friends also gathered in the evenings, and she, too, gladly lent them books. Marina could do everything—drive a car, take photographs, swim, sing. She knew two languages, was fond of drawing, and had graduated from a music school.

"When there's communism everyone will be like Dimkova," Nikita had once said to Alla.

The fact that it was Marina whom he nominated was

especially painful to Alla. But Marina declined the post—she had quite enough on her hands, having recently been elected to the Komsomol Bureau of the whole second year and the chairman of the circle of plant physiology. In her turn, she proposed Varya. She was very persuasive, and in the end Varya became Komsomol Organizer.

That day marked a change in the atmosphere. And two months later, when a speaker at another student meeting carelessly used the words "as bad as Group 3", he was hissed down. The words "Group 3" were no longer synonyms for bad. Varya was so completely honest and so obviously upset whenever she had to rebuke a comrade, that there was no resisting her. She said bluntly that she was not going to deceive either the Bureau or the monitor for the year—as Alla had done—and that if the girls missed lectures, they must expect to answer for it. The result was that absenteeism was reduced almost to zero.

To the surprise of all, Group 3, under Varya's unobtrusive guidance, came out second in the mid-winter examinations.

At a meeting of the Bureau, Lyuba insisted that Varya describe the methods by which she had managed to pull up her group. But no particular methods had been used, Varya had simply tried to delve as deeply as possible into whatever came up, and this characterized all her actions.

Something very unpleasant had happened in the second-year group. A novel of student life had appeared in the magazine *Novi Mir*. This novel had evoked animated discussions which, beginning in the break, continued during the ensuing lecture, and developed with such violence that the indignant professor complained to the dean. An indignant article made its appearance in the wall-newspaper, and Lyuba was called to the all-faculty Komsomol Bureau, a fact which was rather distressing.

"Of course it's right for us to enlarge our horizons

and read fiction, but I don't wish to get a reproof on that account from the Komsomol organization."

It was thus that Lyuba began her wrathful speech at the Komsomol meeting called to discuss the unfortunate event. Towards the end of her speech, however, the students began whispering and laughing, and the speaker who followed Lyuba tried to make out that there had not been any special noise, and that if a note intended for someone sitting in the first row had fallen practically on to the reading-desk, it had been purely accidental.

Varya timidly asked for the floor. She was very nervous, never before had she addressed such a big audience. But how could she remain silent if she did not agree with her comrades?

When Lyuba called out her name, Varya made her way to the platform in a state of such agitation that she was scarcely conscious of the steps beneath her feet. The seats rose fan-like up to big windows, now rosy from the sunset. And all the seats, from the bottom row to these rosy windows, were filled with human eyes—all fixed on Varya. When she began her speech with a troubled: "What are we doing, Comrades?" there was such sincere concern, such a sense of her own guilt in her voice, that the noisy, whispering audience fell silent. Varya's voice was so low that she was afraid no one would hear her, but when Lyuba said her time was up, everyone shouted: "Let her speak!" and a forest of arms shot up. Cheered by this, Varya warmed to her subject and found herself, to her own surprise, recounting the gist of what she had read and heard of Moscow University in earlier days. The figures of those who had studied and worked there in other times, times that were hard, bitter and dark, rose up before her hearers. Varya reminded them of Professor Anichkov, whose thesis had been denounced as blasphemous and burned on the Red Square. She spoke of Herzen who, along with his fellow-

students, had been locked up for rebelling against the stupidities of Professor Malov.

"There were all kinds of professors in the past," Varya said. "Some, of course, were progressive individuals, but others were ignorant, intolerant, mercenary. One could not gain knowledge from their lectures; one had to seek it outside the lecture-room. And knowledge thus gained would often run counter to what the professors taught.

"And we are as noisy at lectures as little children, as if we couldn't discuss the book after studies. We simply don't appreciate the conditions we are given—dormitories and stipends and books. We are free from all cares, and how did students live in the old days? Where the post-office now stands, there was a select boarding-house for a few students, and the tsar himself used to go and look under the beds in search of illegal literature. They weren't allowed to read the best books. When there was a cholera epidemic, many of the students went to fight it. They were heroes. And all we have to do is study. Nothing more. And we behave as if we were school children, though we are most of us nineteen years old. We simply don't seem to be able to realize that we are really grown-up people. Do you know how old Griboyedov was when he graduated? Seventeen—and from three faculties, not just one."

"Well, he was Griboyedov," cried Yura Dozhdkov, but he was immediately hissed down.

"And what used to be the lock-up in Herzen's time is now our dining-room," said Marina, and it was so quiet in the room that everyone heard her remark, though it was spoken in hushed tones.

After the meeting Lyuba walked up to Varya, gave her a slightly patronizing pat on the back, and declared: "You have the right approach to the masses, Varya!"

From then on Varya was elected to some post or other

at almost every meeting. Towards the end of her second year she was not only the Komsomol Organizer of her group but member of the editorial board of the wall-newspaper for her year, editor of its bulletin, and Trade-Union Committee member in charge of living conditions. In her enthusiasm Lyuba had even tried to make Varya organize a singing circle, but that proposal was met with a flat refusal. Varya had acquired some experience of social work, and she knew that anyone who bites off more than he can chew usually begins to do poor work. But she managed to cope with all the jobs she undertook and was rapidly becoming one of those individuals who are always in request. The biology faculty rang with: "Where's Varya?" and "Have you seen Varya?" And the once retiring Varya had come to be considered an active social worker.

Now, setting out for Moscow as students' trade-union representative, Varya imagined herself telling the dean of the state of affairs at the biological station. The dean would probably be very angry with the director, dispatch his secretary to the shop to get medicines and a tank for boiled water, and nominate an efficient person in the place of the old director.

She heard a firm, masculine step behind her. Quick as ever to imagine Nikita everywhere, Varya blushed crimson, but did not turn round. It was just possible that Nikita might have business in town, too. A pity they were so near the station, but there was still the train journey. And it was quite a long one.

"For goodness' sake, Varya, don't walk so fast!"

Varya turned. It was Gromada. "You fly as if someone were after you," he added with a chuckle.

She gave a sigh of relief. She would not have known what to say to him, had it turned out to be Nikita. Ivan Ostapovich walked beside her, trying to adjust his stride to her short energetic step. After puffing silently at his

pipe for a while, he began to talk. His speech was unhurried and laconic. Varya liked listening to him. They hardly noticed that they had reached the station and got into the railway carriage. The slow local train jogged on, enveloping the birch-trees which lined the track in grey smoke.

Ivan Ostapovich had embarked on a new tale:

"Along the banks of our Amur, now...."

He had met many interesting people, visited many beautiful places, read much, and had a good store of knowledge. At first Varya had been astonished at the way he spoke of any region, any town, as if he owned it. But soon she got so accustomed to his style that it would not at all have surprised her to hear him say: "In our stratosphere", "in the depths of our Pacific".

After graduating from courses for military interpreters, Gromada had joined the navy and seen many lands. Varya had never before met anyone who had been abroad. "In that Washington of theirs," Gromada would say, and the brief phrase was icy in its aloofness.

When the train pulled in to Moscow, Gromada looked anxiously at Varya. It seemed to him that she was looking thin and tired. He asked her sternly when she thought she would be free, and bade her meet him in the Gorky Park of Culture and Rest at four.

"I'll take you for a row on the Moskva River, and then we'll eat somewhere," he said, speaking to her as if she were a little girl.

Varya gave a sigh and gladly accepted his invitation. Then she ducked into a Metro station and Gromada gazed after her affectionately. He had a sister who was just as slim, just as fair, just as quiet.

At the dean's office the secretary told Varya that Comnade Khrust was engaged and would not be free for two hours. Varya then proceeded to the trade-union room, where she had been promised passes to a sanatorium for four of their students. It appeared that the office staff

had forgotten all about these passes. Quietly but firmly Varya said she would not go until she got them. Only when she was handed the necessary documents to get the passes did she relax and go back to the dean's office.

The dean was still busy. The secretary told Varya she was sure he would not be able to receive her and that she had better hand in her application.

"It isn't an application, it's a letter."

Without replying, the secretary took the letter and shoved it into a drawer of her desk. Varya stood uncertainly in front of her, and then went out. But after taking a few steps along the corridor, she remembered the leaky roofs, the sour cabbage soup, the confusion which had seized everyone when Zina had fallen ill, and she firmly retraced her steps. Her face crimson, she told the secretary that it was absolutely imperative for her to speak to the dean, and that she would wait until he was free. With a shrug of her shoulders, the secretary took Sharov's report and slipped into the office. She was back again in another minute, burying herself once more without a word in the novel she had been reading before Varya's intrusion.

A few minutes later the door of the inner room opened.

"Who's come from Professor Sharov?" asked the dean.

Varya leaped to her feet.

"I have," she said.

The dean courteously stood aside for Varya to pass into his room, and asked her to sit down in an arm-chair.

"What's all this going on in your place?"

Varya began explaining. At first she spoke timidly, fumbling for words, but as the dean listened attentively to her, without interrupting, she took heart and described the unfortunate state of affairs at the biological station in words which seemed to her vivid and convincing.

"All this is of course extremely annoying," said the

dean, when Varya had done. "Evidently it's partly the fault of our management here, and partly Professor Sharov's fault. He's never undertaken the organization of practical work before." Varya made as if to stick up for Sharov, but Khrust went on speaking. "But frankly, Comrade Berezhkova, as a former Komsomol member, I'm rather surprised—what are you so upset about? In my day we did our practical work when there weren't any houses at all at the biological station. We lived under canvas. Yes, we did. And we were perfectly content. As for a kitchen—" the dean paused and it could be seen from his face that he was enjoying his memories—"we used to bake potatoes in the ashes and make fish soup over a bonfire," he concluded.

"The director doesn't allow us to make fires," Varya ventured to interpolate.

But the dean ignored her objection.

"This generation has quite different demands. That's natural. But I can't help thinking that petty everyday discomforts should not be allowed to affect progress and discipline among the students."

Varya longed to explain to the dean that everyday discomforts had not so far affected progress and discipline, but the dean had by now made her feel thoroughly ashamed to say so. What fine people they must have been! Living in tents, eating potatoes cooked over camp-fires, and perfectly content! She envied the dean. Varya had often told herself that she had been born too late. The romantic, heroic days were over. How nice it must have been to live under canvas! If only the director would allow them to make camp-fires in the evening they could dry their boots and bake potatoes. True, there weren't any potatoes in the storeroom at the biological station. The director had told them that the entire crop was being kept for seed, and the new crop wasn't ready yet. Varya rose awkwardly.

"But we'll take immediate measures to make matters better," said the dean. "Professor Shumsky is leaving to-morrow for your parts. There'll be a lecture on genetics at the biological station. He and Professor Sharov can decide what is to be done on the spot. And in a few days I'll come myself. So there you are."

"Thank you ever so much," said the delighted Varya, and left the room.

The dean followed her out. The secretary directed an inquiring glance at him. Khrust shrugged his shoulders as he listened to the cheerful clatter of Varya's heels in the passage.

"I knew how it would be," he said, with an ironical sigh. "I knew if Sharov was sent to the forest we would have to install central heating under every pine-tree."

The secretary sighed her sympathy.

"I'll go to the country," said Khrust. "I'm worn out. Call the car."

It was too early to go to the Park of Culture and Rest, and Varya decided to rest in the court-yard, which was surrounded by spreading limes. Professors' cars were parked against the wall, for the buildings abutting on the court-yard contained the professors' flats. A young fellow was tinkering with one of these cars. To her astonishment, Varya recognized him as the high-spirited, freckle-faced son of her professor of organic chemistry. Two years ago the lad had been a rowdy, the terror of the university yard. He was constantly sending balls through window-panes and making all sorts of trouble. Now she saw him courteously hold open the door of the car for a girl and get in after her. As the girl sat down, she gave him a winsome smile, and the car drove out of the yard.

Thus was Varya forced to the totally unexpected conviction that time passes rapidly and that two years had already gone since she first entered the university.

The court-yard was now a quiet, summery spot, not its usual self at all.

From the beginning of the autumn term the deserted university yard was filled, every hour and a half, with a restless crowd of students. They ran about the streets surrounding the university too, but the centre of motion was inside the yard. Waving their brief-cases, their coats flung over their shoulders, they rushed from building to building in opposing streams. These were first-year students. The geologists hastened to the botanical department, the biologists to the physics building, the physicists to the chemical building.

Second-year students did not run about so much. Grown wise by experience, they gave in their coats at the cloak-room as soon as they arrived in the morning, so that they only had to stand in line twice a day. They had learned that there was a good snack-counter in the chemical building, and that note-books could be bought in the physics building. In addition to this, second-year students were bolder, and sometimes appeared in the court-yard even during lectures.

Third-year students did not run about at all, with the exception of groups with double designations—the bio-chemists, physio-chemists, and so on, who made their solemn way towards some extremely serious practical work. The area of their movements had narrowed down to the dimensions of their faculty. General subjects were done with, specialization had begun.

The fourth- and fifth-year students remained not only in their own building, but in their own groups, their own room, at their own tables. These were the fortunate ones whose path in life was clear. True, they never got enough sleep, sitting up nights over their graduation theses and shivering at the thought of final examinations, but they were fortunate folk, nevertheless.

It was too early as yet for Gromada to meet her, and Varya thought she'd take a turn in the streets. It proved a fatal decision. In a shop she had entered to buy herself a penknife, Varya espied a water-tank. There it stood, clean and shining, its handles sticking out like ears. They only had to fill it with boiled water, and one of their problems would be solved. Varya spent all the money she had to purchase the tank. Here, as always, she instinctively obeyed the dictum of her Komsomol conscience. But no sooner did she find herself alone in the street with the tank than she was seized with a sense of despair, for the tank proved to be a highly inconvenient article to carry about. Besides, it had a tap which kept dropping out, causing her to stop every few minutes, place the tank on the pavement, and restore the tap to its place.

It was now too late to take her burden to the hostel. The university cloak-room was closed in summer, and she could not leave it in the laboratory, because her train left at seven in the morning, and the laboratory did not open until eight.

When she arrived at the park with the tank, Varya was nearly exhausted.

Gromada saw her struggling, red-faced, out of the tram with the tank. He suggested chaffingly that they would have to buy it an entrance ticket and began working out various schemes for carrying it about. They might carry it between them, each holding a handle, or the man might go in front carrying the tank on his head, while the girl followed in his wake to pick up the tap when it fell off.

Having squeezed every drop of fun there was to be got out of the tank, Ivan Ostapovich persuaded the girl at the turnstile to keep it for them, and led Varya to the boats. After their row, he took her by the hand as if she were a little girl and solemnly led her to the restaurant.

They took a table right by the waterside. Varya had

never been to a restaurant before. Gromada enjoyed the sight of her shining eyes and her eyebrows raised a little in timid surprise. He could picture to himself how his mother would receive Varya in their home. She would make her sit down at the table and then sit by her side, loading her plate with dumplings, tomatoes and fresh cucumbers and murmuring: "Help yourself, Varya dear; eat up everything. Why, your neck is as thin as a kitten's!"

Varya made him feel home-sick, and he had a longing to talk to her of the whitewashed house in a far-off cherry-orchard, of the warm smell of fresh bread, the fragrance rising from the pears and plums lying in heaps in the storeroom. But he remembered that Varya was an orphan and decided not to talk to her about his mother.

He solemnly ordered *borshch*, beefsteaks, ice-cream, and even some cherry brandy—his mother would have been sure to offer her cherry brandy.

"Hungry?" he asked her, smiling.

Varya nodded. She had had nothing to eat all day but the traditional student dish—a portion of salad consisting mostly of beet-root, and two jam puffs. She almost never ate soup any more. When the choice was of soup or dessert, she lacked the will power to make it soup.

"Well, did you have a pleasant chat with the dean?" asked Gromada, in a tone which Varya found it hard to interpret.

"Yes. Only he said we were spoilt. When they were students, they used to live in tents, he said."

Gromada smiled ambiguously.

"I dare say tents don't let rain through the way our barnack does."

Varya agreed in her heart that a tent would have been cosier, but she was in such a blissful mood and the *borshch* smelled so delicious, that she did not wish to spoil the occasion by a detailed report of her talk with the dean. So she answered briefly:

"To-morrow Professor Shumsky is expected at the biological station. There is going to be a lecture on genetics. The dean said Shumsky would settle it all with Nikolai Alexandrovich. And—"

She broke off, noticing the sudden change that had come over Gromada's face. It was no longer the good-natured face of the man with whom she had just been rowing, and who had laughed and joked and talked nonsense and tried to persuade her, as if she had been a little girl, to order a quart of ice-cream at one serving. His face had become harsh. It even seemed to Varya that the bright row of ribbons on his chest lent a new and formidable light to the countenance of Ivan Ostapovich.

"Finish your dinner," he ordered.

Thoroughly bewildered, Varya gulped down her beef-steak without much relish. Gromada glanced at his watch and said to the waitress:

"Cancel the ice-cream. No time."

Quickly settling the bill, he almost dragged Varya towards the exit. As they approached the gates, Gromada caught Varya's glance wandering in the direction of the Ferris wheel, which was already illuminated with many-coloured lamps, and remembered that he had promised to take her for a ride on it.

"We'll have a ride on it one day, honestly we will, Varya, and we'll have ice-cream too. But now we must hurry. That Shumsky! The Chair isn't enough for him; he will addle every student's brains with his Morganist genetics."

Gromada helped Varya on to the tram and clambered in with the tank. On the way to the station he tried to explain to her how the work on which Shumsky was employed ran counter to the ideas of progressive scientists, and that as Party Organizer for their year he was responsible for all that went on and would have to hurry and have a talk with the students and be present at the lecture.



"You're just a parcel of kids," he smiled. "Take yourself for instance: you consider yourself a student, but you're hardly out of the schoolroom. You're a silly little kitten, that's what you are."

Varya was not offended. Who could be offended by those friendly tones and that affectionate smile? Besides, Gromada was quite right. Varya simply could not understand why Gromada should be so upset about the lecture. She sighed her regret that the happy outing should have come to an end so abruptly.

The train journey ended at dawn, and the walk from the station was a dismal one. Gromada strode morosely at Varya's side, carrying the tank, and the expression on his face boded no good for Professor Shumsky and his beloved flies.

CHAPTER 9

The warm summer day had begun badly for Anna Yasnova, pig-tender at The Streams Kolkhoz. Indeed, the trouble had begun three days before when Astra had farrowed, for Anna had scarcely closed an eye since then. She fussed over the piglets and received the usual lot of visitors. People streamed in from all over the district to have a look at Astra. The visitors had admired Astra's delicate pink complexion, stroked her soft bristles, agreed with Anna that her profile was exceptionally beautiful and invariably wound up with a request to be allowed to buy one of Astra's offspring. How could they know that from the moment Astra was delivered, she had become Anna's personal enemy—for the sow turned out to be a shockingly neglectful mother!

Just when the sucklings would settle down for a good pull, she would get on her feet and shake them off in the most inconsiderate manner. For want of their mother's

milk they failed to grow and slept badly, whining and moving their hoofs restlessly.

As it was, Anna had had plenty of trouble with Astra's babies. While the first dozen were being suckled, it was necessary to take the others away from their mother. Anna was reluctant to give any of them to another sow, fearing the supply of Astra's milk would be diminished.

To this worry was added a host of minor vexations. The greater part of the litter was condemned as defective, though Anna regarded every single one of her charges as a future champion.

And the zootechnician, Alexei Vyushkov, stubbornly maintained that Anna herself was to blame for Astra not suckling her offspring. She should have kept a sharper look-out to see if the milk-teeth of the piglets were not too long, and if they were, to file them down. The piglets bit Astra, and she was afraid of them, that was all. It had nothing to do with her disposition. According to Alexei it was perfectly sound instinct. But although Anna had quite a special feeling for Alexei, and was second to none in her respect for science, she could not be got to agree with this. She was angry with Astra, and ever after changed the affectionate name of "Astra" for the mysterious and insulting appellation of "Medusa". She felt as if by this means she did something to revenge herself on the fat hussy, who was so indifferent to her own children.

But Medusa did not care what people called her. She had never responded to her name anyhow. She was a stupid, peevish glutton of a sow, the boar himself did not dare to approach her.

This time Medusa brought forth 19 sucklings. After looking them over, Anna made the rounds of the sties. The cement floors gleamed, and the spacious windows let in floods of light. All the other sows were behaving as proper sows should, lying quietly on their sides and feed-

ing their young. The sound of peaceful sucking and rhythmic breathing calmed Anna down somewhat. But when she got back to Medusa, the problem-mother was already on her feet and had even managed to step on one of her sucklings. Anna's assistant, Dusya, was trying to persuade Medusa to feed her babes.

"We've built a palace for you, you fat fool," chided Anna, "and you refuse to do your job. It says in Professor Redkin's book that the English Berkshire sow is an exceptional mother. And look at you! We'll sell you to another kolkhoz, then you'll see the difference!"

Dusya laughed.

"Sell her, will you? You have no right to sell her. Besides, you'd be selling your own reputation."

"Reputation!" sighed Anna, not without bitterness. "They say it isn't a new breed at all. I can't think what'll happen to our piggeries now."

She cast a sidelong glance at Dusya. Dusya was always ready to contradict her about everything.

But this time Dusya, with unusual meekness, only sighed and tried to make Medusa lie down in order to give the sucklings another chance of getting their mother's milk, but Medusa stood firmly on her straight legs, which seemed too slender to support such a mountain of flesh. The vicious, well-groomed, rosy body waited by the door, swaying slightly, the personification of impatience.

"You never forget your own feeding-time, but you're too lazy to feed your babies," grumbled Dusya. "Better let her out; she won't lie down; anyhow it's her feeding-time."

Anna opened the door and Medusa rushed out into the passage. All the pigs were scurrying to their troughs. Fat, pink, magnificent backs swam past. Suddenly the traffic was held up and the sows crowded to the walls of the passage, jostling one another, clearing the way. It

was the boar stalking slowly down the passage, swaying heavily from side to side, looking neither to left nor right.

"Our pigs are all right," said Anna.

"The pigs are all right," echoed Dusya, who seldom missed an opportunity to make some caustic remark, "but you've come a cropper over those foxes, Anna Semyonovna. You haven't fulfilled the task the Komsomol gave you. Where are your fox-cubs? And the chairman boasting we'd overtake The Dawn. Overtake, indeed!"

Anna flared up. Was it her fault? The foxes had received good care; their regime was the right one.

"Come on, let's take them to the crib," she snapped, and, picking up a suckling, carried it into a spacious whitewashed room. There she put the suckling on her lap, and Dusya handed her the bottle. The piglet pulled eagerly, with evident pleasure. Its little body was smooth and warm and smelt of milk.

Alexei Vyushkov appeared in the room quite unexpectedly. How good-looking he was! You'd never believe there were such good-looking people in the world! Anna bent her head lower over the suckling and the bottle.

Dusya slipped out of the room with a derisive: "They say 'two's a company, three's a crowd'."

"Whose piglet is it?" inquired Alexei.

"Whose is it?" mocked Anna. "If you had been attending to your business, you wouldn't be asking that, Comrade Biologist. We began to feed them from the bottle to-day. It's Medusa's, of course. Here are all their weights and measurements."

"Good. Very good data, very." Alexei read the notes attentively and looked the sucklings over.

"I was at the biological station last night," he at last brought out, in answer to Anna's unspoken question.

"What for?"

"On account of the bees. Serious trouble at the apiary. Fewer bees every day. So I went there. I hoped to see

Professor Lopatin, but he was out in the woods, of course. I talked to Sharov, but it was no good. 'I deal with the zoology of vertebrates,' he said, 'and bees are invertebrates.' As if I didn't know that myself." Alexei was on the point of pulling out a cigarette, but, with a timid glance at Anna, changed his mind. "'Wait till the entomologist arrives,' Sharov said, 'only don't forget he will have his own plan to fulfil, and won't have much time to spare.' "

"Don't get so excited, Alexei. Sharov is a scientist, a specialist in another branch of science."

"He's a scientist—that's just it. Oh, Anna, you have no idea of the battle that's going on in science!"

The sun streamed through the window, resting on Anna's fair hair and white smock. Alexei could not take his eyes off her.

"I think..." Anna began, but stopped short as she met his gaze.

The piglet sucked in the last drops of milk with a whistling sound, ending in a grunt. Returning the pig to the basket, Anna picked up another, choosing the one which made the most noise. It was not his turn, and he could have waited, but Anna was longing for a little quiet. She was sure Alexei was going to say something very important. Alexei was a queer person. Even when they were alone he talked of nothing but work. He couldn't stop, once he got started. She glanced at him out of the corner of her eye. He looked different from his usual self—embarrassed, excited.

"I wanted to tell you something, Anna..." he began, but just then a door banged in the passage and someone called out in loud, ringing tones:

"Is the Secretary of the Komsomol organization here?"

"Yes," replied Alexei reluctantly. "I'm the Secretary," and he stepped forward to meet the new-comer, who

turned out to be a buxom, rosy-faced girl. She looked earnestly at Alexei.

"I wonder where I have seen you before?" she asked.

"Where are you from?"

"From Moscow," was the proud reply. "From the university."

She greeted Anna, whom she had not noticed till now, and cast a glance of frank curiosity at the piglet.

"Why are you feeding it?"

"The farrow was exceptionally large," Anna answered in icy, official tones. "The mother is not able to suckle them all."

And not another word did she say. She was not bound to inform a stranger, especially one who had come at such an inopportune moment, that Medusa had a bad disposition and would not feed her babies properly.

"What was it you wanted?" asked Alexei.

"I'm from the university. Our biological station is next to your kolkhoz. We'd like to offer you our help. I've come to arrange a series of lectures for you. It is our duty to raise the cultural standards of kolkhoz youth."

Since "raising the cultural standards of kolkhoz youth" stood as a constant item in the plan of Alexei's Komsomol organization, he looked with awakened interest at the girl.

"I'll give the first lecture myself," Lyuba said sternly. "Get as many of your people to come as possible. To-morrow at nine in the evening."

"Out of the question."

"Why is it out of the question?"

"The Secretary of the kolkhoz Party organization is giving us a talk on Korean events to-morrow."

"Valid reason. The day after to-morrow, then."

"That'll suit us," said Alexei. "The day after to-morrow at nine p.m."

Lyuba nodded assent.

"What will the lecture be about?"

"About kok-saghyz. It's a rubber-bearing plant, you know. I am a botanist, and rubber-bearing plants are my speciality."

Alexei's countenance showed great animation at this.

"Kok-saghyz is a very interesting subject. Have you the latest data on it?"

Lyuba answered with an indulgent smile:

"I think we have. I come from the university, after all."

"What year are you in?" inquired Alexei.

"In the second, practically in the third. As soon as we finish our field-work, we'll be considered third-year students. So everything is settled? Mind you let your young people know about it. Prepare them for it, explain its significance. Understand?"

Lyuba was just going out, when she remembered something, and paused in the doorway.

"Oh, yes! You may call the young people from neighbouring kolkhozes too."

"We can invite people from *The Dawn*," said Anna. "Their kok-saghyz plantations are doing nicely."

"What's that?" cried Lyuba, turning sharply.

"The kolkhoz is getting great profits from kok-saghyz. The Lysenko method has yielded splendid crops."

"Lysenko, did you say? We haven't studied Lysenko yet."

Anna shot a triumphant look at Lyuba. She knew that such an answer would evoke a burst of indignation. Much to her surprise, however, Alexei glanced indulgently at Lyuba, as if at a junior, and there was even a touch of sympathy in the glance.

"That's quite natural," he said, "we didn't study the method at the university, either. But we did at the kolkhoz. And we have profited greatly by it. There are many

things we're not taught at the university. We have to learn them ourselves."

"What d'you mean by 'we'? Were you at the university?" asked Lyuba. Anna hurried to explain. "He's taking a correspondence course at Moscow University—a biologist, like you."

For a while the silence was broken only by the champing of the piglet at the bottle. Then Lyuba said, with a slight tremor in her voice: "In that case, we'll postpone the lecture. I'll have to work a little longer on the subject."

"I'm afraid you won't be able to get the necessary material at the biological station," Alexei remarked. "Perhaps we'll do it differently. We'll hold a—what shall we call it?—a gathering for the exchange of opinions. You'll make a report and our Komsomol members will tell about their practical work. And you'll invite some of your students. What do you say?"

The moment was a hard one for Lyuba.

"When do you want us to come?" she asked.

"In a week or so," answered Alexei. "Let our people get ready—they're not used to reports. But if you are interested in kok-saghyz, you might find some data in our laboratory. Would you like me to show it to you?"

Anna turned away, angrily shoving the piglet into the basket. It squealed, and the other piglets immediately chimed in.

Lyuba sensed that something had gone wrong.

"I'm sorry. I'm afraid I'm tearing you away from your work. Perhaps we're disturbing them," she said, with a nod towards the squealing basket.

"Not at all," said Anna. "We're used to visitors. Lots of people are interested in our farm. Newspaper correspondents keep coming, academicians often drop in, and people from the neighbouring farm, which is not as successful as ours, sometimes come to consult us."



Lyuba turned to the door once more. Alexei was about to follow her, but was stopped by Anna's tense voice:

"Comrade Secretary. I thought you had something to say to me."

Anna stood clutching a piglet firmly to her breast, and though it could scarcely have felt very comfortable, it kept silent, probably out of sympathy.

"Later ... to-morrow perhaps...."

And Alexei followed Lyuba out of the room. Anna looked morosely out of the window, then turned away with a sigh and began feeding the last piglet. She heard someone's heavy breathing behind her, just outside the window. It was Shura, Anna's 15-year-old assistant and closest friend. Shura looked downcast. It was obvious that she had brought bad news. She seemed unable to speak, and stood gasping like a fish, her breath issuing from her mouth with a whistling sound. Her flaxen plaits bobbed up and down on her shoulders, and she gazed despairingly at Anna with green, tear-filled eyes. All this was very unusual, for Shura enjoyed general respect as an exceptionally serious-minded, self-controlled young person. It was because of Shura's serious attitude to study, and what the teacher called her deep interest in Nature, that her school Komsomol organization had assigned her to the animal farm as Anna's assistant.

She looked after the foxes, conscientiously adhering to the rules, feeding them at stated intervals and never neglecting the diary in which she put down her daily observations. The male fox was called "He", the vixen "She" in this diary, and in addition to entries on the state of their digestions, all the psychological changes taking place in their enigmatic fox-souls were noted. The diary was interspersed with tragic entries, such as: "He is cross with me", and "For the second time He refuses to play with me, and follows Her about everywhere...."

"Shural!" cried Anna in dismay. "What's the matter, my pet?"

"The cubs are born," Shura at last brought out, "and She's carrying one about in her mouth, and He's eaten one...." Tears streamed down her cheeks.

When Anna and Shura reached the animal farm, they found things just as Shuna had described them.

The wicked fox, having just devoured his own child, was licking his chops with outrageous nonchalance. The vixen was running backwards and forwards in the cage, a little dark bundle dangling from her jaws.

Stealing up to the cage, Anna caught the male fox by the tail. But she must have held it awkwardly, for the fox, drawing itself up, sank its teeth into Anna's other hand. Anna seized it by the scruff of the neck, but it did not immediately relax its hold.

Anna looked round in perplexity. The fox-farm was in the woods, a long way from the village, and there was nowhere to leave the fox. Ruthlessly dragging it along the ground by its tail, Anna ran to Auntie Nastya, the forester's wife. The chairman usually put up visitors in Auntie Nastya's house. She was an excellent cook. Her clean, airy house was in the heart of the woods, only four kilometres from the club and the various farm buildings, in fact from all the places visitors were expected to see. This enabled Zakhar Petrovich to show off his horses. Every morning a fresh horse was sent for the visitor, and the horses were grey, imposing, high-tempered, remarkable.

When she saw the panting Anna dragging the fox along the ground, Auntie Nastya came to meet her with unhurried steps. Anna gave her a confused account of the misfortune at the animal farm, and Auntie Nastya, whom nothing could ever astonish, went to get the key to the guest-room. It was empty at the moment. The shed or hen-coop would have been no good: the fox would have got

out. Anna let it go and it hid behind the chest of drawers. Auntie Nastya bathed and bandaged Anna's hand. She then removed the table-cloth from the table and the quilt from the snow-white bed, and folded them neatly. She felt the windows to see if they were fastened properly.

"You can come to-night and clean up after it," said Auntie Nastya placidly. "What do you give it—meat?"

"The miserable wretch—" began Anna angrily, but realizing immediately that there was no time to give way to her feelings, she checked herself, and asked Auntie Nastya to give the fox meat, and above all, plenty of water. Her hand was beginning to hurt, and this was particularly unpleasant in that it reminded her, not only of the disaster which had taken place, but also of her utter inability to handle the animals entrusted to her charge.

The red vixen was still racing up and down the cage. In front of it, silent and startled, stood children who had run up from all over the village. On a nearby tree-stump, Shura sat crying.

The vixen suddenly stood still, put down the cub and began digging a hole in the floor of its house. At first nobody realized what was happening. The vixen was going to bury its first-born. To bury it alive—the long-awaited silver fox! Shura rushed to the cage, pushed the vixen aside, and snatched up the victim. Then she crawled into the house, shouting something inaudible, and when she came out again everybody could see that there was another cub in her hands.

The vixen now began to look for her babies. But nobody pitied her. Everyone crowded round Shura, in whose lap the two cubs were writhing like new-born kittens. They were tiny, with blunt, blind masks. Both were dark, with only a few white hairs sticking out of the end of their stumpy tails. "They take after their father," came in a delighted whisper from the boys and girls crowding round the cage.

Anna maintained an anxious silence. What was to be done? Give them back to their mother? She would probably try to bury them alive again. But would they be able to raise the cubs without her? The one the vixen had been carrying about was lying almost motionless; there was a wound in its side where its mother must have knocked it against the wall of the shelter.

"Come on," Anna called to the weeping Shura, "let's wrap them up and take them to Zakhar Petrovich."

They had great difficulty in finding the chairman. Wherever they asked—at the brickworks, in the orchard, at the dairy, in the hot-houses—they got the same answer: "He's just left." The phrase was spoken in varying tones. Some were complacent; this meant that the chairman had praised them. Others sounded aggrieved; that meant they must have been given a dressing-down.

They entered the office of the kolkhoz board just as Zakhar Petrovich was about to leave. He listened attentively to Anna's tale of woe.

"We'll share the blame, Anna," he said when she had done. "Don't be put out. Go to the biological station and see Professor Lopatin. Ask him what's to be done with the cubs. Tell him I sent you. Come on, I'll take you as far as the bridge."

"It'll be awkward telling the professor about it," said Anna.

Zakhar Petrovich became gloomy. He could not stand it when things went wrong, and was not inured to mishaps. It took him a long time to get over each one, and he was furious with anybody who reminded him of them. But he was angrier still with those who avoided saying unpleasant things to him. Zakhar Petrovich was a difficult person.

"H'mph," he grunted, and moved resolutely towards the door.

The moment she saw him Ribka came towards him, shaking her head and jingling the harness. No power on earth could make Ribka go away from a house when Zakhar Petrovich was in it. People were often surprised that the chairman of the collective farm, with a famous stud-farm to choose from, elected to drive such an ordinary horse, low-hung, of no particular colour, and always shaggy, however carefully she was groomed. But one glance at the bulging brown eye beneath the stiff, grizzled eye-lashes, at Ribka's angry, wrinkled-up lip, and the observer could not help thinking: "Why, yes, you're a cunning old girl!" It was obvious that Ribka thought of herself and the chairman as "we". And how could she have thought otherwise? She trotted steadily and unhurriedly all day, waited patiently in rain or snow, ate at any spare moment, never complained, and was always ready to do whatever was demanded of her at the moment. Even if the chairman went from one house to another, Ribka would follow him like a dog, breathing on his shoulder.

Ribka now waited patiently till the chairman and Anna took their seats in the trap, and then started off at a steady trot, without waiting for orders. She seemed to guess that Zakhar Petrovich was in a hurry, and when he was held up for a moment in the road, Ribka impatiently shook the reins and finally started off, as if she were nothing but a stubborn, disobedient horse who did not like standing still. The chairman flung a glance at his abandoned interlocutor, shrugging his shoulders helplessly, as if to say: "I am not my own master," while he stared approvingly at Ribka's shaggy back. He really had no time to spare; he was hurrying off to the district centre.

Anna noticed neither Ribka's machinations, nor the chairman's cunning. She kept on looking under the lapel of her jacket where, wrapped in a towel, snuggled the

cubs. The chairman set her down at the entrance to the biological station and she made her way uncertainly towards a nearby house, pressing the silent, warm, tiny cubs to her bosom.

CHAPTER 10

On returning from the kolkhoz, Lyuba went straight to the laboratory, where Vera Vasilievna had assembled her students for examination in the zoology of vertebrates. Lyuba was the first to be examined. She was not a bit nervous. She knew the subject by heart. Her diary was in order, her maps precise. She handed over her student's book with a smile. But Vera Vasilievna lingered, gnawing the top of her fountain-pen.

"Excuse me, Vera Vasilievna, but I'm in rather a hurry," said Lyuba at last, unable to restrain herself.

"Why?"

"We have a lecture on genetics to-day. We're expecting Professor Shumsky and his assistant from Moscow. And I must see that everything is ready."

Her eyes on Lyuba, Vera Vasilievna slowly drew a lean scraggy "4" in her student's book. Lyuba picked up the book with an offended shrug of her shoulder and stood before Vera Vasilievna in an expectant pose.

"I thought you were in a hurry, Lyuba."

Lyuba stood waving her student's book, ostensibly to make the ink dry more quickly.

"Why haven't I heard anything about this lecture before, Lyuba?"

"It's not in the curriculum. It's an item on the programme of Komsomol activities. Current topics."

Vera Vasilievna shook her head.

"Everything is 'current' with you, Lyuba. Why don't you ever stop and think? Where and when is this lecture to take place?"

"Seven o'clock. In the dining-room."

"Why the dining-room?"

"Why not?" asked Lyuba in bewilderment.

"Well, it's not a closed Komsomol meeting, is it?"

"No."

"Then why the dining-room? Surely the woods would be better. Your last meeting, about the students' progress, was also held in the dining-room. What did you discuss at it? Botany and zoology, wasn't it? Plants and birds. They are all round us. And you shut yourself up in the dining-room! Stuffy. Posters all over the place: 'Maintain Order!' 'No Smoking!' And a smell of fried food. Don't you see how inappropriate it is, Lyuba? Is there a clause in the Komsomol Rules which says that 'activities', as you call them, should be conducted in the most unsuitable places? Show me that clause."

"And is there a clause that says they must be conducted in the woods?"

"The clause exists—if you have eyes to see it." Vera Vasilievna studied the indignant flushed face before her. "There, you're offended! If you take it into your head to be offended with *me*, Lyuba, whom will you listen to? Why, I was Komsomol Organizer when you were so-high. In a huff, are you? I gave you a four, and you wanted a five, didn't you? Oh, how you wanted a five!" Vera Vasilievna laughed. "A fat five, like a little pillow. To lay your head on. Resting on your laurels. No, Lyuba, I will not give you a five. Your knowledge of zoology, just like your knowledge of Komsomol Rules, is deficient."

"Vera Vasilievna! I have the rules by heart!" Seldom in her life had Lyuba felt so insulted.

"That's just it. You're a crammer, Lyuba, that's what you are. Why do you look at me like that? You've got your zoology by heart; you've got your Komsomol Rules by heart. But you're too lazy to study them properly... too lazy to think."

Lyuba listened in silent indignation. All this fuss about having a meeting in the dining-room!

"The lecture has to be in the dining-room," she said at last. "Diagrams and plans will be demonstrated."

"There was no need to arrange this lecture at all."

"What do you mean by that? Excuse me, Vera Vasilievna, but we have instructions from the faculty Komsomol Bureau. And the lecturer is a member of it. In accordance with Komsomol discipline I—"

"I know you're a disciplined person, Lyuba. And I respect you for it. But try to understand me. You say you know the rules. But you really don't. Not the way you should. The rules indicate a general line, and the only ones who truly follow it are those who *understand* the rules, and don't just learn them by heart, those who give their minds and their hearts to them, those who are constantly on the alert. Think it over, Lyuba. Well, who comes next? Berezhkova? Call her in!"

Lyuba went away, feeling thoroughly upset.

"Only a four! She's cross to-day. Very strict," she whispered to Varya.

But in the bottom of her heart Lyuba knew very well that it was not a matter of Vera Vasilievna's mood. Vera Vasilievna was no different from her usual self. The root of the trouble lay in Lyuba herself.

Hungry as she was after her visit to the kolkhoz, Lyuba did not go to dinner. For the first time in her life she felt the need of being alone, and so she wandered into the woods. The meeting was to be held in three hours—she would have plenty of time to get things ready.

Lyuba was nineteen. Her life had been serene and unruffled. While still a child, she had mentally divided time into two periods: one was the dark, airless void known as "before the Revolution", and the other was the only real world—the bright, national world in which she

had her being, and in which everything was accessible and comprehensible.

Once, at a Pioneer meeting at school, Lyuba had said: "Revolution is a holiday." She had said it standing up behind her desk, a short, sturdy little figure, with laughing brown eyes and cheeks almost as red as her Pioneer tie.

Of course it was a holiday. What else was it? It was a sort of birthday, differing from family birthdays only because everybody kept it on the same day. The first November celebration that she remembered had begun in the early morning, on her father's broad shoulders, as he had carried her through the streets, amid crowds, banners and song. And it had ended in the evening at home, where there was a smell of freshly-baked pies, where starched curtains hung crisply at the windows, where the whole family gathered around the long festive table.

The things that Lyuba had subsequently learned while studying the history of the Revolution, the questions put to her during university examinations, were closely and familiarly bound up with the history and life of her own family. The Revolution and the Civil War were the biographies of her relations—their youth, their private lives, their occupations. From her childhood she was accustomed to hearing the names of the heroes and leaders of the Revolution mentioned as if they were the closest friends of the family. In her home they were spoken of by their first names and patronymics, remembered in revolutionary action and for their part in constructive work; they had been the leaders and friends of her grandfather, father, her uncles and aunts.

Lyuba had grown up among steady, fair-minded folk, confident of their powers and their usefulness and of the rightness of their way of life. They had loved Lyuba and guided her.

And she could look them all straight in the eye—father, mother, grandfather, and her school-teacher as well. Such had been her childhood, a childhood made still happier by her feeling of invulnerability; her conscience had been clear; things were as they should be.

"Lyuba, Lyuba, my little Lyuba," her father would say, rumpling her unruly golden locks.

In those days she had only been responsible for her own life; she had only to keep her blouses ironed, get good marks, fulfil her Pioneer duties. And then, little by little, she began to be responsible for others. She knew she would "get it" from her mother if her younger brother and sister brought home low marks; the school committee and Pioneer Council would upbraid her if the wall-newspaper was not out in time, or if the children in the summer camp did not gather their quota of medicinal herbs. Then came adolescence. And the wonderful feeling of invulnerability to which she had grown accustomed had accompanied her through adolescence as through childhood. Her conscience was clear, and things were as they should be.

At the university, too, things were as they should be: she was elected Komsomol Organizer, did her work well, got top marks at exams and received honourable mention. But every now and then the feeling of invulnerability deserted her. At first it deserted her for short periods, when, for example, she had been vaguely stirred by something said by Varya in a heart-to-heart talk, or by a mocking glance from Gromada. There would be short and unpleasant moments when she would feel disgusted with herself, or hurt with others.... But she never gave herself time to get to the bottom of things. She had little taste for reflection, and she went on, taking the fleeting doubts in her stride, as if they were so many ditches cutting across her straight, clear path. But the number of these ditches grew. They obstructed her progress more and

more frequently, they became wider and deeper, and harder to leap over. Supposing one day she were to miss her step?

Lyuba liked gay music, and pictures that had splashes of sunshine in them. She did not know what it was to be tormented by doubts, to be unable to sleep, to vacillate. "That's poetry. Try and be more matter-of-fact," she would say to Varya, curling her lip. She taunted Alla or Zina with "Insomnia again? Nerves?"

But something had begun to upset Lyuba this year, even disturbing her sleep. And this something was no mere insomnia, or nerves, or weakness.

"Lyuba, watch your step!" she had said to herself after her first disturbed night.

That had been in the winter. She had prepared a report on "The History of the Krasnaya Presnya District", which she was to read at a meeting of her electoral district.* On the eve of the meeting her father had come home late from work, seated himself at the table and begun to read her report. Her cheeks burned when she remembered how she had sat there smugly waiting for him to praise her. She had made many such reports rich in dates, names and facts which everyone knew. Her father grew glummer and glummer as he read. Then he slowly folded the pages.

"It wasn't a bit like that," he had said. "You might have asked me. You are nineteen, Lyuba. At your age we were fighting. It's time you understood things better. According to you, it was very easy to make the Revolution. You grudge the time, Lyubov Ivanovna, to find out how people gave up their lives for your sake."

The next morning Lyuba had gone to the District Kom-somol Committee to ask them to postpone her report. The

* *Presnya* is a district in Moscow famous for the bold fighting of its workers during the uprising in 1905. After the October Revolution in 1917 it came to be called *Krasnaya* (Red) *Presnya*.—*Tr.*

instructor of the District Committee expressed first astonishment, then anger, upbraiding her and threatening her with an official reprimand. But Lyuba had stood her ground. She spent several days in the Krasnaya Presnya Museum and in the Museum of the Revolution. And two weeks later she made her report. It was a weekday and her audience, composed mostly of women and children, had not been a large one.

But two days later she was asked to read the same report at a Sunday morning meeting of voters. This time the hall was packed.

Lyuba had been somewhat reassured by this experience. But not for long. Her encounter with Alexei Vyushkov at the kolkhoz had upset her.

By now she knew better than to leap blindly. She had learned to stop and think. At last she found a satisfactory explanation for her blunder—"a gap in our academic programme". But then there was that talk with Vera Vasilievna....

"Could you tell me where Professor Lopatin is to be found?"

The girl whom Lyuba had met that morning at the collective farm was standing before her.

Only after she had spoken did Anna recognize in Lyuba the student who had taken Alexei away that morning. "I wish I hadn't asked her," she thought.

But Lyuba smiled graciously and listened with great sympathy to the story of the fox-cubs.

"Come on, we'll find him," she said energetically.

A girl in a long flowered dress with the skirt tucked up was washing the steps to the porch of one of the houses. She was a very pretty girl and her dress was simply lovely, and Anna stood for a moment looking at her. The girl did not know how to wash steps. Grimy streams flowed on to the step below the one she was washing, and she had not sense enough to mop them up. Flinging

out her hands in a gesture of helplessness, the girl met Anna's eyes.

"You should change your dress, you'll ruin it," said Anna in friendly tones.

"Never mind, Alla!" said Lyuba encouragingly. "You'll do better the next time. Have you seen Fyodor Fyodorovich?"

"He's gone to the thrushes."

Alla straightened up. At last she had finished the porch. It wasn't exactly clean, but still it had been washed. Anyhow it was wet. And whether it was clean or dirty would be seen when it dried. Alla wore the expression of a person who has conscientiously done his duty, and the dimples in her rosy cheeks twinkled.

"Fyodor Fyodorovich went out with Marina. She's in Belevsky's brigade now. Instead of Nikita. Nikita's going to work on rodents with Sharov. And everyone who passed the zoology examination well has gone with them."

"And what about you?"

"I only got a three. The examiner was very particular."

Lyuba sighed and turned to Anna:

"Let's go to the thrushes, then."

"Is your professor very bad-tempered?" asked Anna, cutting across Lyuba's meditations.

"Very," answered Lyuba absentmindedly, and hastily checked herself. "I mean, not a bit, he's only strict. Don't talk now. We mustn't make any noise near nests, and there's a nest quite near. Wrens. Chaffinches."

Lyuba, screwing up her eyes, examined some bushes which all looked precisely the same, and plunged confidently beneath one of them. Anna followed her. They found themselves in a little glade entirely surrounded by low fir-trees. Several people were assembled there—as many as eight—but the stillness was as unbroken as if

nobody was in sight. Beneath the fir-trees was a dense undergrowth consisting of bushes and seedling firs. A girl with her back to Anna was kneeling down, bending over something. Her thick fair plaits reached the ground and made Anna green with envy. Opposite the girl sat an old man in a black jacket. In his hands was a set of apothecary's scales. In one pan were weights, in the other a pink, squirming bundle.

"It's gained fifteen grammes," whispered the old man, looking severely at the two girlish faces peering through the branches.

The girl with her back to Anna wrote something down. The old man got up, when he was seen to be very tall, and approached a nest, holding a fledgling in his hand. Then he turned to Lyuba and Anna.

"Did you want to see me?" he asked, exactly as if he were receiving visitors in his study.

"We've had an accident," breathed Lyuba. She had more than once got into trouble with Fyodor Fyodorovich for her high, loud voice, and she was trying to speak low.

Fyodor Fyodorovich gave an unintelligible nod and slipped his hand into the nest. A large speckled bird called out angrily to him from a neighbouring tree. Fyodor Fyodorovich nodded apologetically in its direction, and bent over the nest, whispering tenderly to the fledgling. Then he took out another and handed it to Marina. Marina lifted her head, and for a moment Anna forgot about the cubs and her fear of Fyodor Fyodorovich. She did not know whether Marina was to be considered a beauty, but she felt in her inmost being that she had never seen anyone so beautiful before. There was a peculiar, reserved beauty in that face, with the fair upslanting brows and the tender lines of the large, firm mouth. Marina laid the fledgling on some cotton wool, and screwed up her eyes as she adjusted a tiny camera.

"What's your trouble?" asked Fyodor Fyodorovich.

Anna began to explain.

"You're a fine set of people!" he interrupted her, and forged ahead with such long strides that the girls had to run to keep up with him. "A fine set! You would have gone on sitting in the bushes another two hours. Animal breeders! I didn't expect this! Zakhar Petrovich has let me down. You've disgraced yourselves. You get a litter, and look how you treat it! And such a litter—hybrids—most interesting."

"Never mind, don't be downhearted," Lyuba consoled Anna on the run. "He's hot-tempered, but he's wonderful. It's just that he's so sorry for the cubs."

Fyodor Fyodorovich suddenly swerved aside.

"Careful, a nest!" he cried, without looking back.

Anna would have stopped to find out where the nest was, and what bird inhabited it, but she could see nothing but gnass and bilberries, and so she ran round a bush to catch up the professor.

"Where are you going?" she at last mustered up the courage to ask him.

"Where d'you suppose? To your place, of course. To the kolkhoz. The cubs must be instantly taken away from their mother."

"But I did take them away!" cried Anna.

Fyodor Fyodorovich halted.

"Why couldn't you have told me that before?" he boomed out. "What do you mean by sending an old man galloping through the woods for no good reason?" He gave Anna no time to defend herself. His eyes were smiling now, and his beard, moustache and the bushy brows which were almost as big as moustaches, flew up mockingly. He motioned towards a tree with his eyes alone. Up the trunk, its grey body flat against it, its head nodding busily, a bird was rapidly spiralling. "The nut-hatch," said Fyodor Fyodorovich approvingly, and made his way cautiously around the tree. He only looked round

when they had left it behind. "An extremely shy bird," he explained. "Extremely."

"Would you like to see them?" ventured Anna.

"That's what I'm hurrying for. Come on! Where did you leave them? In whose care?"

"I've got them here."

Anna drew the cubs out of the front of her jacket.

"Why couldn't you have told me everything at once? Let me see them. Shaking them up, and not saying a word! Funny people, upon my word! How could you?"

He took the two little black bundles in his hand, carefully stroking the fine dark fur with a roughened yellow forefinger. The cubs did not move, they just lay sleepily on Lopatin's palm, small and pitiful. And saddest of all—they wanted nothing. They wanted neither to eat nor to drink. Nothing but to be there quietly in the kind old hands. The sensitive fingers with their gnarled joints touched one of the cubs very carefully, and immediately a wound could be seen on its neck—narrow white semi-circles traced in the torn, dark, short fur.

"Mother must have dragged it about," said Fyodor Fyodorovich.

Anna nodded wretchedly. She had had no idea that the cub had such a bad wound.

"Lyuba!" commanded Fyodor Fyodorovich. "Find me a cat. One with kittens. This instant! And you, Anna Semyonovna, come with me. It's a very good thing that you decided to breed foxes." Fyodor Fyodorovich strode ahead as he talked. "A very good thing. Profitable, interesting. But what is wrong is that you undertook it without knowing how. How long does a fox carry?"

Anna said nothing. If only he had asked her about pigs!

"You don't know? You ought to. Fifty-one days. The female must be isolated a few days before the cubs are born, otherwise the male eats them, as you have ob-

served. In the second place—the vixen must have a house specially built—like a long wooden pipe. Dark. In imitation of a burrow. Then the fox is at ease. If she sees anyone take notice of her babies, especially if she's a wild fox, not used to human beings, she drags them away and hides them. A fox may lose her head and drag them about till they die. That also you have observed. It's too late to give the cubs back to their mother now. The first thing to be done is to try and put them to a cat with kittens. When we find one, we'll give them to her. This is generally a success, but it may also be a failure. In that case, they will have to be artificially fed. Yes." Fyodor Fyodorovich fell silent, bending ever so slightly over Anna, and said, like a doctor offering his sympathy:

"There isn't much hope. One-day old, dragged about, and you so inexperienced. I tell you frankly, there's very little hope."

"I'll feed them through a rubber nipple," said Anna in trembling accents.

"Nipple? No, that's no good. They're too weak, they wouldn't be able to suck. Well, come on!"

They were approaching a small house. It could scarcely be called a house, being more like a booth for selling mineral waters. An imposing rusty padlock hung on the door. Fyodor Fyodorovich lifted the lock, which turned out to be unfastened, and invited Anna to enter.

The room was very small. Against the wall there was a cot. At the head hung two plump, clean, pinkish rubber boats, and at the foot was a gun, a cartridge-pouch, a bicycle pump, field-glasses, a tin pail with holes in the lid, and all sorts of other objects. Near the window facing the door stood a long table strewn with birds' nests, instruments, the carcasses of various birds and small animals, and, in the midst of all this litter, a microscope.

Fyodor Fyodorovich spread a soft rag on the table and placed the cubs on it. They moved their paws feebly and

uncertainly and seemed to be seeking for something with their blunt noses. Fyodor Fyodorovich examined them minutely, carefully separating their toes and lifting the round, blind heads with his hand.

"They've been dragged about a lot," he repeated and put one of their noses against his cheek. "A slight fever, just as I thought. We'll try to save them, though. Life is a very insistent thing, my friend."

Motioning towards the bed, he said: "Take a seat," and Anna sat down on it.

"No—bottle-feeding won't do. They won't be able to pull. Try to find a syringe, and in the meantime you can use a medicine dropper. The fox's milk is very rich, mind you. You'll have to take cream and heat it to body temperature; if you get it any higher, it may turn. While they're so small, feed them from a medicine dropper like this one here."

Lyuba appeared in the doorway. Fyodor Fyodorovich looked at her expectantly.

"There's only one cat, but it's a tom," said Lyuba sadly.

"What a misfortune. Everybody here used to have cats. Of course it's quieter for the birds without them, but—"

"I'll go and continue my search. There's a lecture tonight," said Lyuba, with a note of interrogation in her voice.

"I know there is," said Fyodor Fyodorovich gruffly, but the next moment he smiled at Anna and produced a tin of condensed milk from the cupboard. "Since the cat's a tom, we'll feed them ourselves—at least until we find a puss. You must feed them often," he continued, opening the tin. "A little at a time. Six hours' interval in the night. The cubs must be kept warm." Here he carefully tucked the rag round one of them to keep out the draught. "But don't overheat them." He plugged in an electric stove,

heated some water, and washed the eye-dropper. "If they live, keep notes. Weigh them. Make drawings of the way their fur grows."

"They're both silver foxes," said Anna proudly. "Look at them, they're quite dark. They take after their father."

"Foxes are always dark when they're first born—silver ones, red ones, even white ones. So it's impossible to tell what they'll turn out."

Fyodor Fyodorovich placed the tin of condensed milk in the saucepan of hot water. When the milk was warm, he diluted it with water and filled the dropper.

Eagerly Anna watched the skilful hands open the tiny mouth. The cub eagerly sucked in the milk. The old hands and calm eyes seemed to be calling it back to life. The sensation of milk in its mouth made the fox-cub shift its paws just as the piglets had. The tiny pads prodded Fyodor Fyodorovich's hand with insistence.

"Hungry little thing!" said Fyodor Fyodorovich tenderly. "What more can we expect from it? Put this ointment on their wounds."

After he had fed the cubs he covered them with a towel to keep them warm and selected from among the numerous large files on the shelf, bearing such inscriptions as *The Beaver*, *The Squirrel*, *The Grouse*, *The Wolf*, *The Sable*, one entitled *The Fox*.

"You'll find some information here. You can take it, but be sure to bring it back. And I'll write a few things down for you." Taking a clean sheet of paper, he wrote out in a regular hand, which one would not have expected from the big, lively man with the unkempt grey hair: "How to Observe and Record the Development of Fox-Cubs". Under this heading he put down tasks and questions to be answered. He also described in detail how the cubs were to be weighed, how their measurements were to be taken, when to be on the look-out for their eyes to open and the first hairs to appear on their pads. Every

now and then Fyodor Fyodorovich stopped writing and turned to Anna. He advised her to use not a ruler, but a string for measuring their tails. Then he gave her a magnifying glass for watching for those hairs to appear.

"And," he added, "don't forget to look after their teeth, I beg you. Give them the right food; otherwise their teeth will be bad."

Fyodor Fyodorovich began filing the edges of the dropper, muttering: "The edges are rough; they might cut themselves."

Thus Anna was gradually initiated into the mysteries of looking after one-day-old fox-cubs. She learned that the cubs' nostrils must be cleaned to save them from suffocation while sucking. Fyodor Fyodorovich showed her how to make little twists of cotton wool for this purpose and how to use them. His fingers were large, but the twists came small and neat. The fox-cubs underwent the operation with perfect composure.

At last he put the bottle of medicine, the schedule and the file on foxes into Anna's hands and saw her out.

"My regards to Zakhar Petrovich, and Zakhar Vasilievich too. I'll be over soon to have this out with them. How is the stud-farm getting on? Fine horses you have at The Streams. My compliments to your famous pigs. A certain academician mentioned them in a report the other day. I'll tell him you've gone over to foxes, shall I?"

"No, this is only a side-line."

Fyodor Fyodorovich looked questioningly at Anna.

"You'll soon be head over ears in this side-line of yours. And you'll desert your piglets."

Anna shook her head indignantly.

"No offence meant, Anna Semyonovna. Pigs are very engrossing, but so are foxes. And they present so many unsolved problems. I want to get a student of mine, Varya Berezhkova, interested in foxes. It will be very

interesting to compare your notes and hers. She's conducting her observations in the woods, and you in artificial surroundings."

The sun was high. The pine-trees exuded a strong warm smell. Fyodor Fyodorovich stood at the door for a moment, drinking in the air with as much pleasure as if it were hot, fragrant tea.

"I'll be sure to look in on you to see how your silver foxes are doing."

Anna hurried off towards the gate of the biological station. Her determination to rear the cubs was stronger than ever. She ran, holding them against her breast, the file entitled *The Fox* under her arm, and the magnifying glass and dropper clasped in her hand as if they were charms.

The students remained in the dining-room after supper. Lyuba had covered one of the tables with a strip of bunting and placed a water-bottle and glass on it. She was very pleased with the arrangements.

"See what a really interesting event does for us!" she said to Shumsky's assistant, who was pinning diagrams to the wall. "A hundred per cent attendance!"

The assistant nodded absent-mindedly as he unrolled another diagram.

"Shumsky's flies," somebody said in the hall. Each diagram portrayed a Drosophila fruit-fly. The genetics laboratory was employed in studying the laws of heredity as "revealed" by these flies. The geneticists adored the Drosophila, considering it most convenient material for laboratory experiments owing to its rapid reproduction and the fact that the cells of its saliva glands display the chromosomes with unusual clarity. Comparable chromosomes in the reproductive cells were, the geneticists insisted, the sole bearers of hereditary traits. One of the

diagrams showed a gigantic chromosome divided into areas—concentrations of “known” genes.

Lyuba rapped the water-bottle with her pencil as a signal for the meeting to begin, but a voice behind her said:

“I’ll preside. Go and sit down in the hall.” It was Gromada.

“But I don’t understand. Why?” Lyuba expostulated.

“Sit down and listen; then you’ll understand,” said Gromada, turning to the table.

“Shall we begin?” he asked the lecturer.

CHAPTER 11

Professor Illarion Erastovich Shumsky, rejecting the chairman’s suggestion of resting a few days at Auntie Nastya’s in order to inspect the stud-farm and the kolkhoz as a whole, went straight to the laboratory.

Zakhar Petrovich sent Shura to fetch the Secretary, the zootechnician Alexei and Anna, who managed the piggeries.

Zakhar Petrovich was greatly surprised to see the professor take a box out of the car. Surely the professor did not suppose there was no microscope in the collective-farm laboratory! Perhaps his was a very special one. But no, it was just an ordinary microscope.

The people sent for arrived very soon. The professor cast a glance over their attentive faces, and began:

“It is not for me, Comrades, to tell you how important work on improving the breed of stock is. And it is very hard for you to do this work on your farms. Your job is to raise pedigree animals. No experimentation is permissible. You consider, for instance, that the pigs sired by your boar Kamish have excellent qualities. But as a matter of fact this is not true. We have tested ani-

mals bred at your farm and sent to other kolkhozes. In 1946, for example, Orlyonok, son of your Kamish, was given to The New Way Kolkhoz. And a thorough study of his descendants yielded lamentable results. The pigs were no good—feeble, with many undesirable characteristics. They had not a single one of those features which you claim for your herds."

"That's not the point," burst in Alexei. "I've been there, Comrade Professor. They systematically practise close in-breeding: sires with daughters, brothers with sisters. Degeneration is inevitable. In-breeding is only permissible in special cases."

"You are greatly mistaken, young man," interrupted Shumsky, after listening attentively to what Alexei had to say. "This is not a matter of in-breeding. You apparently have a wide knowledge of the subject...."

"He's taking a university correspondence course," explained the chairman proudly.

"Good," said Shumsky. "Then you will understand me perfectly. What is wrong with the descendants of your Kamish is by no means due to in-breeding, but to defects in the hereditary characteristics of the parents."

"Then how is it, Comrade Professor," interrupted Zakhar Petrovich again, "that we have developed such fine stock? We have even obtained new characteristics. And why? Because our hog-tenders work day and night; the animals get the best attention and are cared for according to the latest scientific discoveries. We don't allow in-breeding, frequently change our sires, and at the same time reject about three-quarters of every litter. We've rejected three whole litters. And now all my work is being held up—we are sent one boar for the whole herd. And its points are not suitable here."

"I can hardly argue with you, Comrade Balashov," said Shumsky. "We approach this question from somewhat different points of view. There have always been

chance prize winners in all breeds, but there are no grounds for thinking that the descendants of your champion Kamish, or your Astra, will inherit their fine qualities. You must have a pure-bred boar in your herd, for whose descendants the breed farmers can be held responsible."

"But your pure-bred boar is old-fashioned," broke in the irrepressible Zakhar Vasilievich. "The characteristics of our hogs answer modern demands. We may already be said to be on the brink of producing a new native breed, Comrade Professor."

"That's what I brought my microscope for," said Shumsky. "Kindly look at this." He slipped a slide into the microscope. "See these sections? This one is from the reproduction cells of those pure-bred boars to which you raise objections, and this is from one of yours, sent to be slaughtered, which, you state, differ from the pure-bred ones. What do you see here? Those dark lines are chromosomes, the transmitters of inherited qualities. The only part of the body capable of handing down inherited characteristics. And now look here. See? Count the chromosomes. Observe their shape. Those ones are like a shepherd's crook." Shumsky uttered the last word with gusto, and actually smiled. He was pleased to have found a simile which his hearers could understand. "And then look at these. If you look at them carefully you will see that the number of chromosomes in both sections is the same, and the shapes are the same. Hence it follows that your boars cannot transmit any other inherited characteristics."

Everyone took turns to have a long look through the microscope, comparing the sections, counting the chromosomes, trying to distinguish the hooks, crooks and lines.

"And what are those?" inquired Zakhar Petrovich politely, pointing to some small black specks scattered among the chromosomes. "They seem to be the same in

colour and in every other way as the chromosomes. What are they?"

"Oh, nothing," said Shumsky. "They don't count."

Zakhar Petrovich turned away from the microscope.

"They may or may not count, but who knows if some hereditary characteristic is not contained in those very specks? Their number is different, and so are their shapes. Since the differences are so slight, perhaps the new characteristics come from these specks?" He paused for a moment, and then added: "D'you know what request we should like to make of you, Comrade Professor? Come and see our piggeries. Why should we study nothing but these cells? Let's go and look, so to speak, at the whole pig. Astra, now. She's the daughter of Daisy No. 31. There's a sow for you! She has a litter of twenty at the moment. Given the strictest selection possible I guarantee you not less than eight first-class pigs. And in eight months these pigs will be ready for market, whereas the offspring of your pure-bred boar takes eighteen months to mature. That doesn't suit me, as a breeder. Moscow, the consumer, is close at hand. I've got to feed you, Comrade Professor. And you ask me to wait another seven months."

"That's right," said Anna. "Come and see our piggeries. You'll see at once what our hogs look like and how much they weigh."

Shumsky shrugged his shoulders.

"I should be delighted to see your pigs, but unfortunately I haven't the time. I must get to the biological station. I will merely repeat, by way of summarizing what has been said, that you may, by excellent care, have brought out the best qualities in your boars. That's a very good thing. But it by no means implies that they may be regarded as the founders of a new breed. Here on your farm you are producing high-grade products

which the state is glad to get. That is your job. But new breeds will be produced at places where scientists are at work."

"Excuse me, Comrade Shumsky," said the chairman, unable to restrain himself, "but as far as I know Academician Petrov was a great scientist, and he based his activities not only on experimental farms, but on stock-farms as well. After all there are far greater opportunities—"

"The moment you produce a hog a little better than others, you fancy you have a new breed," interrupted Shumsky, showing irritation at last. "New breeds take decades to develop. And I may as well tell you that at present the curve showing the development of new breeds is on the decline."

"We're not talking about curves, but about actual pigs," interrupted Alexei. "The time it takes to develop new breeds has changed. It took eight years, if I am not mistaken, to get the Siberian breed."

"The Siberian breed was established in 1942," said Zakhar Petrovich a little enviously. "If all my work had not been undermined by the enemy, I should also have an established breed. I tell you straight, before the war the attitude to this work was quite different."

"There's another thing I don't understand, Professor Shumsky," put in Zakhar Vasilievich. "I've made a rather thorough study of the work of Michurin. I'm a fruit-grower and have tested all his theoretical conclusions in practice. You say hereditary characteristics are only handed down by the reproduction cells, but Michurin created over three hundred new species by the mentor method alone. And in this method the reproduction cells play no part."

Shumsky smiled.

"I'm afraid our discussion is becoming extremely scientific, and it would be rather complicated for me to

explain to you all the laws of heredity, which have been elucidated by the modern science of genetics. During the last few years genetics has developed all over the world, and our Soviet geneticists are in the front rank. Let us hope that our scientists will present you with pedigreed animals having all the qualities you require."

Shumsky rose and put away his microscope.

"I don't understand, Comrade Professor," said Zakhar Petrovich ruefully. "I frankly admit I don't understand how you make that out. Science is progressing and giving me a pure breed, and this pure breed is putting back the term for marketing seven months, as compared with my own achievements."

"One step forward, two back," said Alexei.

Shumsky turned with an abrupt movement.

"How many years have you been studying?"

"I'm just beginning my fourth year."

"Don't you think it's a little early for you to argue with me, Comrade Student?"

"I didn't mean to be rude, Professor. We were only stating facts."

"You state facts about existing animals, while I am speaking of their inheritable characteristics. And I venture to assure you that your very fine pigs will produce unsatisfactory litters."

Realizing that the talk was futile, Zakhar Petrovich sighed and turned to Shumsky.

"Won't you have some dinner, Professor?"

"No thanks, I'm in a great hurry. I had dinner in town."

When he had seated himself in the car, Anna could not contain herself, and exclaimed in a childish, imploring voice:

"Comrade Professor, do come and see our pigs—the farm's quite near! Do!"

"Another day," said Shumsky in kindly, indulgent tones, as if speaking to a child.

The car drove off.

Shumsky came in after the lecture had begun. He made straight for the platform, for he had grown accustomed to presiding at meetings, and began looking round the crowded dining-room. He caught sight of Lopatin seated on a bench at the back, among students. "Ah! They haven't even elected him a member of the presiding committee," he remarked to himself with malicious pleasure, but checked himself as he realized that there *was* no presiding committee; he and the chairman Gromada were the only ones at the table. Shumsky lit a cigarette and began listening.

The lecturer, a lean, sleek-haired and youthful assistant, spoke glibly and confidently, imitating the gestures and mannerisms of his teacher. He had no ideas of his own, and since he was a diligent and docile pupil, he repeated all the assertions of Shumsky and Shumsky's colleagues: every organism consists of two parts—the body, or soma, and the reproductive cells, the latter containing the chromosome complex of hereditary plasm. The genes of these chromosomes alone carry the hereditary characteristics. Whatever the conditions in which the organism is placed, these hereditary characteristics, predetermined by the chromosomes, remain unchangeable. True, there occur unforeseen changes of the hereditary complex, subsequently handed down to posterity, if the arrangement of the genes in the chromosomes is disturbed. For instance, some fruit-flies on which Shumsky had been experimenting had acquired a new characteristic—blue pigmentation of the eyes. Shumsky had managed to raise blue-eyed Drosophila instead of the usual red-eyed

ones.... It was considered a great event in the scientific world. No wonder Shumsky's work was published abroad.

But man is incapable of bringing about desirable changes himself. He is powerless to create new forms. The only thing the geneticist can do is to discover chance changes and, by means of artificial selection, to preserve these changes resulting from a disturbance of the order of the genes in the chromosomes, or from a doubling-up of the number of chromosomes.

Shumsky looked condescendingly at the audience. He was thinking that the students had not the faintest idea of the war that was now being waged in science; the administration was trying to protect their immature minds from pernicious influences. It went without saying that the name of Lysenko was never so much as mentioned either in lectures or academic programmes.

Noting the absorbed silence of the audience, Shumsky remarked to Gromada:

"The meeting is being conducted well. Good discipline."

"The discipline's all right," answered Gromada.

"We ought to hold theoretical research meetings like this more often."

Gromada readily acquiesced.

The lecture was over.

"Any questions?" asked Gromada.

Stepan Poroshin elbowed his way to the front. The students waited with interest. He was so taciturn that many of them had no idea what his voice was like. It turned out to be a deep bass.

"Excuse me, but there's something I don't quite understand. You say a scientific discovery has been made. But what I'd like to know is, whether these flies are harmful or useful? And whether this discovery is of importance to agriculturists?"

The lecturer proceeded patiently to explain that the

Drosophila was an extremely convenient object of study, that it had served the cause of genetics for many years. Stepan heard him out, and then turned to the audience again.

"Perhaps he's right. I'm not capable of judging yet. I hope to understand it all later. You said just now you had been studying this fly for many years. All right, you've studied it. But to what end? What use is it to us?"

Obviously impressed by his own patience, the assistant repeated that the fly signified nothing from the utilitarian point of view, but that it served as material for laboratory research work, enabling scientists to use the results of the experiments on other animals.

"I see—I understand this sort of thing," Stepan agreed amiably. "But it seems you concluded that heredity could be changed by accident only."

"That's right," replied Shumsky's assistant, not troubling to conceal his contempt.

"Do you mean to say that this chromosome of yours," Stepan motioned towards the huge black rod divided into areas in the diagram, "cannot be broken up by man to suit his needs? Not accidentally, you know, but to suit ourselves?"

The lecturer answered with a silent nod. Shumsky smiled.

"Sublime innocence!" he whispered to Gromada.

Gromada was listening to Stepan with narrowed eyes, and Shumsky did not know what construction to put on the chairman's expression. After a pause Stepan proceeded:

"I personally think that this sort of science is not what we need, Comrades. We must develop a science which will give man more power over Nature." And Stepan went back to his seat. But it was evident that he could not calm down, and he exclaimed angrily: "What on earth do we want with those blue-eyed flies, anyhow?"

"Oh, Stepan!" whispered Marina. "Think what you're

saying! Flies with blue eyes! How very sweet!" And though Marina spoke very softly, everyone in the room heard her. Gromada waited for the laughter to subside before tapping on the canafe.

Shumsky exchanged glances with the lecturer. Lopatin did not miss that exchange of glances. Shumsky apparently was unconscious of what awaited him. As for Fyodor Fyodorovich, he had a pretty definite idea of how events were shaping. He had a thorough knowledge of the second-year students. He called the students who had entered the university in 1945-46 "victory recruits". True, the second year held more boys and girls who had come to the university straight from school—"sparrows", he mentally called them—than the third. But Fyodor Fyodorovich had grown to know his "sparrows" and was very fond of them. They gladdened his heart with their incessant chirpings, anxiety and excitement, with their youthful eagerness for the work before them. By the time they entered their third and fourth years, they would have matured into the right sort of people. But in addition to these, the second-year students boasted war veterans like Stepan, Katya Belkina and Gromada—serious, adult individuals, still young, but stern and capable of concentration. They had gone through much, and had forgotten much of what they had learned at school, but though study came harder to them than to the younger ones, they made better progress. Shumsky considered the second and third years to be weak from the academic point of view, but he was wrong in that. Even the "sparrows" became more serious and diligent under the influence of the war veterans. Besides, many of those who had come straight from school, who had received their basic education and had grown up during the war, were unusually serious-minded for their years. Neither Marina nor Nikita could be justly set down among the "sparrows". And by now the half-fledged "sparrows" and the war veterans,

hammering away at science with all their might, formed a solid, influential force. The year had its own Party organization, small but strong, and Gromada had gradually pulled the somewhat diffuse collective together, taking in hand even some of the more feather-brained "sparrows".

Katya Belkina now held the floor. Short, round-faced, freckled, with merry hazel eyes, Katya looked just like a schoolgirl, and it was difficult to believe she was twenty-three years old. The Germans had taken slight notice of the snub-nosed little girl with the scraggy pigtail, little suspecting that she was one of the best scouts in the partisan detachment.

"This is what I want to tell you," began Katya. "I was only a schoolgirl before the war and I frankly admit I was at a loss what profession to choose. Sometimes I thought I'd like to be an actress, at other times I wanted to be a teacher of literature. I never once thought of biology. I come from Kursk. You all know that Kursk was occupied, and when the Red Army drove the enemy out, we went back to homes that lay in ruins. Everything in the town and surrounding farms was destroyed. Cattle and poultry had been killed or taken away, the best sent out of the country; orchards had been felled and burnt down. Things were very difficult, the ground was bare. And then, for the first time, we all realized the importance of scientific farming. Fast-maturing Michurin seedlings were brought to us. Wonderful cattle and poultry were sent to us. For the first time I saw and read what our Soviet scientists, men like Michurin and Ivanov, had done, and what Lysenko had done and was still doing. And then it was that I made up my mind to enter the biology faculty. And it was genetics I was anxious to study, Professor Shumsky, for it seemed to me that this science could be a great help to us in raising new sorts of trees, new fruits, new breeds of animals. But according to you, all this is impossible. How can that be? I'll

tell you frankly—when I saw you in the corridor at the university, I was simply thrilled. I knew you had been in Kursk, carrying on some work. I kept thinking: what a good thing a professor from the university had been sent to help our ravaged town. And just a short time ago, Professor, I read your book on those flies everyone is talking about. Of course I can't understand it all yet. We haven't come to genetics yet. But I understood that you had studied the effect of the war on the number of chromosomes in *Drosophila*. I understand that this may be a very valuable discovery for science, but what I simply can't understand is what will be the good of this discovery if you say man has no power over Nature. What's the good of your work, then?"

"We're not talking of cattle-breeding, or fruit-raising just now, we're talking of genetics—theory, not practice," interrupted Shumsky.

"I understand that. I understand that perfectly well. But I would like to hear something about a science which helps people to live."

"You ought to go to the college for cattle-breeding then," Shumsky interrupted once more, this time with rancour.

"No," said Katya, "I will not go to the cattle-breeding college. It cost me great effort to pass the entrance examinations, and I will go on studying in the university until I graduate, Professor. I mean to become a scientist. I want to study those scientific phenomena which help us in all branches of agriculture."

Katya went back to her seat.

Varya was following the discussion with unwavering attention, but with considerable bewilderment. Everything in the lecture had seemed correct, interesting and important, even to the blue-eyed flies. But what Stepan and Katya were saying touched her more closely and seemed to carry more weight, and although they were only

second-year students, she felt they were nearer the truth than the famous professor and his assistant. Besides, she did not like the way Professor Shumsky had interrupted Katya. Everybody should be allowed to speak out. Varya hated to have people interrupted. She listened, wrinkling her high forehead, her eyes wide open, biting her underlip in her absorption. One after another the students took the floor.

Fyodor Fyodorovich was delighted to note that the students were wise and wary. Those of them who had the slightest stain on their reputations—a bad mark in an examination or a reprimand for infringement of discipline—held their tongues. But although they did not speak, they kept exchanging glances, nudging one another and sending notes to those who were going to speak, in which they suggested various points to be touched upon. Only the students with high marks and unassailable records took the floor. They were thus in a strong position. It was clear that they had a good grasp of what they had been taught; but they were modest enough to realize that they could not afford to take part in an involved scientific discussion. They confined themselves to expressing their surprise and perplexity, and inviting Professor Shumsky and his assistant to answer the questions put to them.

The students referred neither to lectures they had attended, nor books they had read, but kept to matters within their own knowledge.

Then Zina Rizhikova spoke. She meant to become a geneticist and had begun working under Shumsky. She defended the lecturer warmly, saying nobody had a right to demand immediate practical results of science. Zina was known to be an enthusiastic and serious worker, and her speech convinced some of the audience. Nevertheless Shumsky and his assistant looked sour.

It was not the clear, natural way in which the stu-

dents gave expression to the questions and doubts which had accumulated in their minds, that worried him. But behind these doubts and questions and the perplexed eyes of Zakhar Petrovich, Shumsky could see innumerable dubious looks, could hear innumerable questions. Questions put to his science not by students and scientists who were hostile to him for some reason or other. These questions were raised by kolkhoz members, horticulturists, hunters—people expecting daily aid and support from science.

And all of a sudden it appeared that these people were Shumsky's most dangerous opponents in the war he was waging. They were not, as he had thought, his docile pupils. They were volunteers joining the ranks of progressive Russian science. They were marching along the path laid down by Lomonosov, Mechnikov, Sechenov, Timiryazev, Zhukovsky, Pavlov, Michurin and Lysenko.

Gromada—calm, grave, imperturbable—sat next to Shumsky, pretending not to notice his irritation and impatience. Lyuba asked permission to speak. She had been asking for it for some time, but Gromada, glancing at her slyly, kept putting her off. At last Lyuba decided that her speech, as Komsomol Organizer, ought to come at the very end, and sum up all that had been said before. Gromada nodded to her:

"Now then, Lyuba!"

"I did not like most of the comments made to-day," Lyuba began in her usual imposing tones. "We are not in a position to argue about things we don't yet know. We haven't studied genetics yet. After we've studied it, we'll be able to talk about it." All unconscious of Gromada's glance, Lyuba continued: "We must be more disciplined and modest. We are not paving the path of science at present. When we have graduated from the university we can settle these questions. I propose a vote of thanks to our lecturer, and I suggest that those

who are interested in problems outside the curriculum should study them on their own. I, for instance, am interested in rubber-bearing plants. I have got in touch with collective farms and mean to study the practical aspects of the problem."

"After you've done that you'll see you were wrong," Katya chimed in.

Lyuba answered with an angry shrug of her shoulder.

"Lyuba's right, we've talked enough. Time to wind up," suggested Dozhdikov.

Gromada tapped on the table.

Shumsky rose slowly to his feet. He was very good-looking, and his friends assured him he was like a Roman patrician, especially in profile. Therefore whenever he spoke, whether in public or private, he would stand with his head half turned, accompanying his speech with slow, graceful gestures.

"My young friends," he began graciously. "I suppose it is on account of the youth and inexperience of our lecturer that his report on the work done in our department has caused such a strange reaction among you. As a matter of fact your questions have little in common with the subject of to-day's paper. We have been talking to you about painstaking theoretical research work, and you demand from us the solution of isolated practical problems. It is only natural you should be eager to solve these practical problems. As Soviet young people you want science to be creative, productive; you expect it to help us adorn and remodel our country. And so do we. But there are different ways of achieving this aim. You can work on isolated problems, such as the acclimatization of plants, cattle-breeding, or apiculture.... That path is full of joys; it yields immediate results.

"But there is a more arduous path. The hard struggle for the victories of science. Many years ago, a professor of Moscow University experimented on the resuscitation

of the dead. But only lately, during the Great Patriotic War, one of our scientists took up his experiments again, and there are people now alive in our country whose case-histories contain the word 'death', and who came to life when Soviet scientists applied their methods of resuscitation to them. And yet these experiments have not been made public so far. Research, testing, experimenting, are still going on. You see what a long time it takes for anything new to be formulated in science. Science is patient.

"We have chosen this path—the harder one. Physicists locked themselves up in their laboratories for years on end in their quest of the atom, and they found it in the end, putting into the hands of man the most powerful force in the world. We firmly believe that this energy will be employed by humanity for its benefit. And probably there was no one who seemed so far removed from the practical needs of the day as these physicists who were trying to penetrate the mysteries of the structure of matter. We geneticists are also seeking our atom—the atom of the living organism, the gene. And when we find it, we shall make it serve all branches of science.

"Already we are using and testing the results of our work in practical spheres of agriculture. Unfortunately the lecturer took no part in this work and therefore did not refer to the fact that we are working on the development of new breeds of cattle. To give a concrete example, I would inform you that I came here straight from the neighbouring Streams Kolkhoz, where I went on the requests of comrades to discuss new breeds of hogs. We have set ourselves the aim of giving our collective farmers superior pure-bred animals, and we shall do this. We shall devote our science to the service of the people."

Varya looked at Shumsky in despair. Again he seemed to be right in her eyes. He had spoken with such sincerity, using words which, Varya felt, had an echo in the

very depths of her soul, words about their native soil, about the happiness of the people and the arduous paths of science, words which had long stopped being mere words for her, and had become feelings, the most important feelings she had. When quite a little girl she had seen her country wounded and bleeding. She had known hunger and the meagre, frozen squares of bread rationed out during the blockade in Leningrad. That was why these words were not mere words for her—they evoked emotion, caused her pain, made her conscious of her duty. But such words must not be uttered unless one is absolutely certain that they are all-important. It was Kalya and not Shumsky who was right. Either Shumsky was under a delusion, or he was simply lying.

Fyodor Fyodorovich cast an anxious glance at Victor Belevsky. Belevsky, a fourth-year student, Lopatin's favourite pupil and one who had become his friend, would now have to stand up and answer Shumsky. Fyodor Fyodorovich saw Belevsky send a note to the presiding committee.

Shumsky was waiting impatiently for the meeting to break up.

"Time to close the meeting," he said at last to Gromada.

But Gromada was of a different mind.

"How can I close it if people still want to speak?" he retorted, adding amiably to someone: "Come on!" Marina Dimkova came up to the table. Shumsky sat down with evident reluctance. His assistant had often looked at Marina with admiration, but now the charming face seemed to him hostile.

"You say, Professor," she began, "that we must not expect solutions of practical problems from you, that you have buried yourself in the innermost depths of science—" she tossed her thick fair plait over her shoulder with a habitual gesture—"but it seems to me that only the

scientist who never loses sight of human beings can solve theoretical problems correctly. I should like to speak about Timiryazev. Every day we pass the windows of what was his laboratory. From those very windows he studied the sun-ray. We have been shown his instruments; he spent many years of his life perfecting them, and with their aid he was able to study the sun's spectrum."

"That is a rather well-known fact," remarked Shumsky.

"I know, but we haven't come to plant physiology yet, and at present I am addressing the whole meeting," answered Marina icily. "Allow me to develop my point. What could be farther removed from the earth than an analysis of the solar spectrum? And what could have made Timiryazev undertake this work? His love for the earth. He did it for the sake of the earth's fertility, for the sake of man's happiness. He discovered the laws of the eternal exchange of matter, of plant nutrition, of certain effects of the sun on the earth, and he left us this injunction: 'Let two ears of corn grow where one grew before'. It was for the sake of this that he studied the sun. There was nothing like this in to-day's report: neither earth, nor sun, nor the wish to make human life more joyous. There is such a thing as the study of the laws of heredity for their own sake, barren statistics and aimless experiments. You say you are seeking for the gene, which, by the way, no one has as yet seen. But what is the gene to you, if you consider that the germ plasm is immortal, and that man is incapable of altering it to suit his own needs and wishes?"

"She certainly can speak!" Gromada murmured, forgetting himself for a moment.

"I'm not a scientist yet, I only want to become one, but one thing I do know, Comrades: only those who stand firmly on their native soil will ever reach the sun."

Gromada followed Marina with his eyes as she walked back to her seat.

"Good girl!" said Lopatin quietly, looking at the proud fair head.

"That'll do. Close the meeting," said Shumsky.

But Gromada did not so much as look at him.

"Won't you speak, Professor Lopatin?" he asked.

"Do, do, Fyodor Fyodorovich!" said Nikita excitedly. He had been longing to speak himself, but he could not trust himself when he was worked up. And he was fairly seething now.

Fyodor Fyodorovich walked slowly towards the table.

"It seems to me, Professor Shumsky, that neither you nor your pupil have quite understood the questions of our student comrades. They wouldn't dream of arguing with you; they only ask you the questions which rise in their minds. Many of them have just come back from the front. They have come to us to learn how to gain victories over Nature, to make man's life easier, to develop a science which shall give the earth abundance and free the world from the horrors of war.

"It is our business to teach them. They believe us, have faith in us. You and I, Illarion Erastovich, have had many arguments, and you once told me, if you remember, that the coming generation would judge us. It is not judging us as yet; it is only asking questions, but these questions amount to a judgement. They are within their rights in demanding from us that we tell them of the work of our leading scientists.

"We will not continue our arguments in front of the students; there are other places where we can argue and decide who is right and who is to blame. At present this is still difficult; no doubt we need to acquaint ourselves more thoroughly with each other's work.

"I was very glad to hear that you had come here from The Streams. There are fine people there, splendid work-

ers. And undoubtedly the hogs bred at The Streams will show numbers of valuable points, even if they are not yet a new breed. They must have made a great impression on you, didn't they?"

Shumsky smiled vaguely.

"And it seems to me that what we are now talking about cannot be called merely practical questions. What were formerly called practical tasks are now called something quite different, my friends. They are called the transformation of the world. Before our time science could not set itself such a task, for it was then impossible. This is a new quality of our science, of the science which has come to birth in our country, where the people are the masters and where any scientific work may be carried beyond the walls of the laboratory and tested on hundreds of collective farms, state farms and at animal-breeding stations. Not only do they help us solve the problems we have set ourselves in our laboratories; they in their turn raise new problems, new demands. They help us to extend and expand our science.

"This is precisely what Dimkova said to-day, and what she said was not mere rhetoric. She has rightly and poetically evaluated the essence of science. With all my soul" he was addressing Marina now, "I wish you and your friends to give your words practical application—reach out and touch the sun! And you'll do it, for you are standing firmly on your native soil, you are its sons and daughters, and you want to make it beautiful."

Lyuba looked at Lopatin in bewilderment. For the first time in her life she was at variance with her seniors. After Fyodor Fyodorovich had finished and the meeting had broken up, she drearily folded up the table-cloth and put away the water-bottle in the sideboard. What was it exactly that had happened? This was no mere ditch impeding her path; it was a river in spate. And she was standing on the bank, not knowing how to cross it.

As soon as Shumsky was out of the room, the expression of placid good humour disappeared from his face.

"You ought to have kept me informed about the situation here," he said to his assistant.

"I tried to give you a hint——"

"Give hints to young ladies," snapped Shumsky, but immediately smiled affably.

Victor Belevsky was making his way to him through the throng of students. Fyodor Fyodorovich looked after Victor in some surprise. He did not see any point in Victor's continuing the argument with Shumsky just now, but he decided not to interfere. He made a tour of the dining-room, and when he got back to the place he started from, he found neither Shumsky nor his assistant. The students, too, had dispersed. Nikita Orekhov and Victor Belevsky were sitting at a table looking extremely like conspirators as they bent over a big sheet of paper. Hearing steps, both started and bent still lower over the paper, trying to conceal it from view.

"It's only me," said Lopatin reassuringly. "Or mustn't I see?"

They could hardly refuse to let him see, but the two pairs of eyes looked at him so imploringly that Lopatin took pity on them and made for the door. Not, however, before he had had time to notice that, in addition to the usual instruments of toil—paint-brushes, a pot of Indian ink and mapping pens—certain branches and leaves lay on the table. Pretending to be utterly obtuse and unobservant, Lopatin waved his hand to the conspirators, and went towards the door.

"Very ingenious—title-piece made of branches. Leaves glued on instead of drawings. That Victor's a wonder—he makes an event of everything. And Nikita—he lies low and says nothing, and suddenly gives you a surprise. That news-sheet, now. Very simple, but nobody thought of it before. A sheet of paper and a pencil on a string fastened

to the dining-room door every day. Nothing on the paper but the simplest heading: 'Jot down anything of interest'. A splendid diary of the biological station."

Lopatin studied to-day's sheet. Short sentences, laconic phrases, all that could be written while standing up on the way in or out of the dining-room, scribbled hastily, but always about something of real interest: how the blackcaps were getting on in the sparrow's nest—that was Dimkova; how bees had been found in a frog's stomach—Orekhov; how a new fox's burrow had been discovered—Berezhkova.

*I met a lass by the brink of the stream,
And lasses are sweeter than owls, I deem.*

Yura Dozhdikov's autumnal muse had evidently visited him prematurely. Lopatin pictured to himself the scolding Yura would get from Nikita; this struck him funny, and he went out of the dining-room for fear of disturbing the members of the editorial board.

On the whole, things could not be better. And it had to be admitted that to-day's meeting had been extremely instructive. Professor Lopatin went to his room in the best of spirits. He knew that he would do good work that night.

CHAPTER 12

The cat refused to suckle the fox-cubs.

When Anna got back to The Streams, she set all the children of the kolkhoz running about in quest of a nursing-cat. But at this time of year all the kittens seemed to have reached that stage of long-legged, skinny-tailed adolescence in which they chase chickens and get under people's feet.

At last, however, a suitable cat was found in the possession of Shura's grandmother. Though its three kittens were quite big, they were still at the breast.

It had been hard work inducing Shuna's grandmother to allow fox-cubs to be foisted upon the already exhausted mother-cat. Shura's granny was a dour old lady, very fond of her cat and considering foxes useless animals. She was forever grumbling at Shura for spending so much time at the animal farm and talking of nothing but foxes at home. However, they managed to get round Granny.

Shura and Anna squatted by the basket of the old tabby cat, exchanging anxious glances: they were not sure of the reception the fox-cubs would get.

"Here goes!" said Anna at last, and with an ingratiating smile at the cat, Shura shoved the cubs beside her.

At first the cat did not even move, but after a time she raised her head, sniffed at the cubs and gazed long at them. She could not understand what had happened. And her bewilderment was natural enough: she had had kittens at least eight times in her life, but never had her kittens turned small again after long feeding, and never had they smelt so disconcertingly strange.

One of the cubs, moving its feeble paws, pressed its muzzle against the cat. Apparently this familiar movement reassured the cat, for she stretched herself out obligingly, actually uttering the half-interrogatory cat's cry, a blend of miaow and purr.

Anna and Shura sighed their relief. Shura, who had been taught by her grandmother to treat the cat with deference, glanced at it timidly, and stroked it the whole time as she cautiously moved the second cub nearer. Flattered by the attention, the cat stretched itself blissfully and narrowed its green eyes. But just then one of the kittens, which had grown tired of playing with its fluffy tail, decided it was time for a snack and made straight for the fount of nourishment. To its astonishment and alarm, its nose bumped into a fox-cub. Like any decent kitten in a fright, it assumed the offensive—back arched, tail in air, hair on end—and hissed ferociously. The cat stretched out

its head nervously towards the kitten and sniffed at it—her own offspring this time. Then she resolutely shook off the cubs, leaped out of the basket, and stalked across the room to the opposite corner, followed by her kittens.

All was over. The helpless, hungry black lumps stirred feebly in the empty, rapidly cooling basket.

From that day, Anna and Shura took turns staying with the cubs. During the first week, while Anna was at work seeing to her piglets, whose number increased daily, Shura looked after the fox-cubs. At six in the evening Anna came and took over the shift. Shura would gladly have stayed with them the whole evening and all through the night, but her grandmother forbade this. And so Shura would report in detail on the foxes' behaviour during the day and sadly leave Anna in possession.

Now Anna had to spend long evenings by herself. She was afraid to leave the cubs alone at her own house, for the family cat there regarded the cubs as rats. If Anna turned her back for a moment she would hear a suspicious rustling and discover the cat, eyes agleam, body tense, preparing for a leap. Anna began to hate that cat. To this hatred was added another sensation—envy. Anna envied all who had a right to unbroken sleep. The cat slept all day long, while Anna got little chance to sleep even at night. At midnight she would turn the cat out of the room, lock the door, draw the basket up to her bed and try to go to sleep to the persistent miaowing of her resentful foe.

The cat was right, in its way. It could not understand why nattng should be prohibited all of a sudden, and it miaowed long and indefatigably: it could well afford to, having had its sleep during the day.

But most of all Anna hated the vixen, who slept both day and night.

It was not sleep alone that Anna missed these days. She had not been to the cinema or to the club for ages,

and during the long evenings spent with no company but the fox-cubs, she had ample time to brood over the dismal state of her personal affairs.

Dismal indeed; she had not seen Alexei for a long time.

Alexei had promised to come that day, and had broken his promise—not for the first time. Anna roamed sadly about the room, now and then casting irritated glances at the foxes. But for them, she would have gone to the cinema on purpose—and let Alexei look for her.

It was natural that the Secretary of the Komsomol organization should have a lot to do. She was busy enough herself. But surely he could have looked in for half an hour or so.

Alexei really could not have gone to see Anna that evening. The day before Nikita Orekhov, a student from the biology faculty, had come to him, asking if it were true that the number of bees in their hives had begun to diminish. He had been told of this by Professor Lopatin.

"Quite true. We simply don't know what to do. We're at our wit's end."

"I think I can help you," said Nikita. "Come to the pond to-morrow at six o'clock."

Alexei had wanted to drop in and let Anna know, but there had been no time. He had been summoned to the District Komsomol Committee. There had been a great deal to do at the dairy farm and he was free at a quarter to six, when he ran to the pond where he had promised to meet Nikita.

Nikita was already there, lying on the bank and gazing fixedly at the water.

"Lie down beside me and you'll see where your bees go."

At first Alexei did not notice anything. He saw nothing but an ordinary little pond, thickly fringed with duckweed and sharp-bladed rushes. It was very still. A heavy,



golden, spherical bee hummed over Alexei's head, almost touching him. Then he lost sight of it, but Nikita nudged him and pointed out the thin stem of a rush on which the bee had alighted. It was creeping slowly down towards the surface of the water, until at last it touched it. At this moment there was a splash, and the bee vanished. Another flew over, and another. Now Alexei began to see where they alighted. The same thing happened to them all. Alexei began to understand the state of affairs, but the discovery was so unexpected that he still could not quite take it in.

Suddenly Nikita jumped up and extracted a big complacent frog from the pond.

"That's where your bees go. This frog's chock-full of bees. They eat nothing else. Your hives are providing them with the most delicious meals. Bees are a tasty, nourishing diet."

Nikita was delighted. It was his first scientific discovery. He told Alexei how he had been working on the feeding of frogs and had noticed that all the frogs he caught in the neighbourhood of this pond fed mainly on bees. Professor Lopatin had advised him to stay as long as possible by the pond and catch as many frogs as he could, and the very first day Nikita had had an opportunity of observing that the bees which came from The Streams' hives to drink, did not return. The news of the opening of such an unexpected "restaurant" must have reached the frogs with incredible rapidity, for they appeared at the pond in daily increasing numbers. The frogs had become shamelessly impudent. They had not the slightest intention of wandering about in search of food. All a frog had to do was to squat in the reeds and wait for a bee to come, when it leaped up and shot out its tongue, to which the bee instantly stuck.

"That's all," ended Nikita triumphantly.

"Thank you ever so much."

Alexei shook Nikita's hand warmly. The frog, which Nikita had released in order to respond to the handshake, fell heavily into the grass and made its leisurely way towards the pond. Alexei followed it with his eyes.

"The game's up," he said. "You won't get any more of our bees. Try beetles for a change, old man. We'll both profit by it. I'll arrange a drinking-place near the hives to-morrow," he went on, now addressing Nikita. "How could I have overlooked such a thing? The frogs have cost us a lot of honey this year."

It was three hours before Alexei realized that Anna must have been waiting for him for a long time. He had enjoyed talking with Nikita. Nikita himself was astonished to find that he, usually so shy, found it easy to get on with Alexei. Perhaps it was because he had been able to help him, and had therefore felt much the elder of the two; or perhaps it was because from childhood his own development and that of Alexei had been so similar—the same thoughts and cares, the same problems to face at the university. They talked so frankly that Nikita actually asked:

"Are you married?"

"Not yet."

"I'm not either. But I'm going to be."

"To one of your students?"

"Yes."

"Pretty?"

"Very. I've already written to my father," said Nikita. "If he gives his consent, I'll go to her father and talk to him."

Alexei was delighted with Nikita's thoroughness, and in his turn informed Nikita that he himself was on the eve of marriage. He wanted Nikita to go with him that very minute to see Anna, and have tea and talk, but thought himself that his own reception might not be very warm just now.

"She's expecting me," he said guiltily. "And I sit here talking to you."

"Then go," advised Nikita. "It's not nice to keep her waiting."

"Will you come to my wedding?"

"Yes, and I'll bring the fellows," promised Nikita. "May I?"

"Bring them all. We'll have the whole district at our wedding."

Alexei shouted out the last sentence as he ran. It was quite dark, and with every minute that passed he pictured to himself with increasing distinctness Anna's dear, angry eyes.

Anna had given him up. She was sitting on the sofa holding the cubs to her bosom and trying not to cry. All the time she had been indulging in day-dreams: it would be dark on the porch and Alexei would come and say: "Don't be hurt with me, Anna, it couldn't be helped. I have something to tell you—"

A gentle tap on the door startled her. The smell of flowers greeted her when she opened the door. Moonlight fell obliquely upon the boards of the floor. Alexei was standing in the doorway shifting uncomfortably from one foot to the other. Anna was silent—probably angry, he thought.

"Well, how are your babies getting on?" he asked at last.

Nicely, thank you. If Alexei was interested in foxes, she would talk about foxes to him. The eyes of one of the cubs had begun to open that very day. Just a weeny bit. A mere narrow slit gleaming through its fur. Here was something for Anna to boast about. And its tail had grown a whole centimetre since the previous day. Anna demonstrated the cubs' paws. They examined the pads through the magnifying glass which Fyodor Fyodorovich had given Anna. Almost invisible hairs could be made out

on a soft black toe. Then Anna showed him the first tooth which one of them had suddenly cut. It was a tiny tooth, no bigger than the point of a pin. While Alexei inspected the tooth, Anna could not help admitting to herself that she would much rather put the cubs back into their basket and sit down on the sofa beside Alexei.

Anna was actually glad to see the cat which made a most opportune appearance, for the fox-theme was obviously wearing thin; their talk threatened to peter out any minute, and then Alexei would get up and go. Sternly announcing that it was time for the cubs to go to sleep, Anna put them back into the basket and covered them with an old shawl, and came back to the sofa, complaining to Alexei of the cat the while. Alexei listened as patiently as ever. He was sitting in the corner of the sofa, very near Anna. How she longed to stroke his hair!

The cat stretched and, with breath-taking boldness, leaped from Anna's lap to Alexei's knee, where it immediately began to purr. Alexei stroked its back gently.

"Now tell me your news," said Anna, looking enviously at the cat which dared to take such liberties with Alexei.

Alexei began to tell her his news, but, listen as she would, Anna could not understand what he was talking about. What did she care for frogs and bees? Alexei's eyes, hazel eyes, familiar and yet somehow different, were so near. Alexei could see Anna was not listening to him.

A strained silence ensued. The cat gave a loud, insinuating purr, as if trying to make Alexei understand what Anna was thinking about. But Alexei took no heed of the cat. His mind was far from oats or foxes. At last he said diffidently:

"Everybody misses you—there's nobody to lead the singing."

Anna felt suddenly furious. She envied them all so. They were all hay-making, singing away in the fields of

an evening, breakfasting all together at dawn. And Alexei was with them. And she had to look after the pigs all day long. And in the evening the foxes. And here was Alexei without one tender word for her. Forever talking about those beastly frogs. Mean, that's what he was. Grudging her one kind word.

"You all think my work is nonsense, don't you? And who cares how harassed I am with these fox-cubs? Who cares that I don't sleep at night, doing the Komsomol task you've given me? 'Nobody to lead the singing', indeed! You all know how to give a person a task, but when it comes to helping, you're too busy. It's always that way! You exploit my conscientiousness. Nobody thinks of sending someone to relieve me for one evening so that I can get a little sleep! And when you do come, you can talk about nothing but work. Frogs and things. . . . Go away, I don't want anyone. . . ."

Her voice was choked with tears. The cat, too, suddenly grew furious, jumped off Alexei's lap, and began sharpening its claws against the leg of a stool.

Anna shooed the cat out.

"Don't be angry," said Alexei, quite bewildered. "I'm going."

It was amazing the way Alexei could suddenly leave you. Sometimes it seemed to Anna that Alexei did nothing but leave her. He would suddenly turn and go. Scarcely had she time to pull herself together, to think of something to say that would keep him, when he would be out of the gate and far away, the sound of his hurried steps dying in the distance. Why had she let him go this time? And when would she see him again?

They met the next day in the early morning, at the gate of Anna's house. It was mere chance, of course. They walked slowly, side by side, talking incessantly. If they stopped for a moment, they became awkwardly aware of being alone in the deserted road in the uncertain

grey dawn. They were having that awesome first real talk, which can never be exactly recalled later by either of the participants. The talk was remarkable in that whatever Alexei said was exactly what Anna was thinking about, and whatever Anna said was just what Alexei had had on his mind.

They reached the piggery all too soon, but fortunately Alexei suddenly remembered that some very remarkable poplars had just been planted along the river road. So they had to go and see the poplars, a sight which convinced Anna that the most beautiful trees in the world were those that were as slender as willow wands. Then they went back to the piggery.

This was probably the first time in her life that Anna entered the piggery with reluctance, for Alexei had nothing to take him there that day; he, too, had his work to do.

But when, an hour later, Anna let the piglets out for their walk, there was Alexei sitting under the very tree where the piglets usually took their constitutional under Anna's personal supervision. This time, however, the supervision was not very strict.

They had hardly had an hour to themselves when something brought Shura to the scene. This Shura was really a nuisance, always hanging about Anna, plying her with questions, dogging her footsteps. At the sight of Shura, the Secretary of the Komsomol organization lost his habitual poise, and hurried off.

Neither Shura nor the piglets had ever before seen Anna weep. So they all crowded round her and watched the phenomenon in mute astonishment.

Anna laughed and cried as she murmured:

"Always so quiet, never so much as a look, and then all of a sudden...."

The rest was lost in sobs.

But Shura understood perfectly that here was a case when no consolation was needed. With enviable self-pos-

session she sat by Anna's side on the grass, leaping up every now and then when first one, then another piglet started off at a business-like trot along the road. She had to see that the little pigs did not get more sun than was good for them.

At last, pouncing on a pause between a sob and some piglet's recurrent attempt at escape, Shura asked gravely:

"Are you going to get married, Anna Semyonovna?"

The piglets crowded round Anna not because she was crying—what did they care about that? It was simply that the time for their breakfast had come and they wanted to know why she did not take them home.

"I'm going to marry Alexei Alexeyevich," Anna answered proudly, and then, pulling herself together, she turned back to the piggery.

The hungry piglets, jostling one another and grunting in unison, pattered after her.

"An awfully nice boy," Shura remarked approvingly.

Half an hour had passed since Alexei had left them, and the piglets were champing away happily, but Anna was still crying. It was so blissful to cry that she did not even want to stop.

"Never a word, always passing by, and then—all of a sudden—'will you marry me?' Silly, silly boy!"

Anna sobbed again, and smiled, and in her heart all was washed clean, as after a shower, and shining radiantly.

CHAPTER 13

Nikita asked Fyodor Fyodorovich for permission to go to Moscow for the day. "On business," he explained.

"What sort of business?" asked Fyodor Fyodorovich. Nikita was frank. "Personal business," he said.

"What personal business can you have—and in

Moscow? You've got yourself mixed up in a nice business right here."

Nikita made no reply.

Fyodor Fyodorovich, annoyed with himself for being so tactless, said bluntly:

"I'm setting out on an excursion to-morrow morning with your group. Mind you come back in time."

"I will."

Nikita's purpose in going to Moscow was to have a talk with Alla's father. At last he had received a reply from his own father, and the matter of his marriage must be decided as soon as possible. Alla had become impossible. She was late whenever it was her turn to go on duty, she had received a low mark for zoology, and was not getting on with the girls in her group.

An end would be put to all this the minute she married him. She would become more serious, people would begin to respect her, and Fyodor Fyodorovich would grow fond of her.

Nikita felt relieved on receiving his father's letter. Ivan Trifonovich wrote that although he considered it too soon for his son to marry, he would not object if Nikita felt he had found a suitable girl. But he urged him to think it over well; once he had a wife, children would come, and then it would not be easy to go on studying. In short, he would expect Nikita and his wife at the end of the summer. His mother had left him a keepsake, a necklace of Ural stones. Ivan Trifonovich thought Nikita's wife would like it. The letter was unusually long and affectionate. Evidently his father had been reminded of his own youth. Perhaps it was simply that he was growing old. There was even a shade of satisfaction in the letter—his son had grown up and was becoming independent.

Nikita decided to see Alla's father at his place of work. No doubt it would be difficult to catch him at

home. Never once had he seen him when visiting Alla. Besides, Nikita did not like going to Alla's house. He was oppressed by the number of things in it. They were probably very beautiful, but they were intimidating. You mustn't touch this, you mustn't step on that, you mustn't drink out of a certain cup.... Nikita had been brought up on the idea that things existed for use.

There was one picture in Alla's flat that Nikita liked. It reminded him of his native village. Melancholy grey willows drooped over a pond, beyond which the sun was rising; presently the sunlight would touch them, they would awaken, take on colour, and the sadness would pass. But one thing hindered his enjoyment of the picture—he was expected to exclaim over it as if it were the latest model of vacuum-sweeper, which Alla's mother demonstrated with such pride; he was expected to go into transports, when he had no desire to say a word. What he wanted was to take Alla's hand and gaze at the willows and wait for the sun to come up. Besides, Nikita thought it unfair that only Alla, her parents and their guests should have an opportunity to see such a wonderful painting. Once he mentioned it to Alla, who merely pulled his hair and said he was insane. On which he kissed her. Of course after that he no longer had any thought for the picture, for this was not only the first time he had ever kissed Alla, it was the first time he had ever kissed any girl. It was twilight; Alla murmured something soft and tender and disconnected, and Nikita couldn't for the life of him make out how he had ever had the courage to kiss her.

Nikita knew where Alla's father worked. He entered the Pass Bureau and boldly picked up the telephone receiver, but the metallic voice of the operator quite put the name he wanted out of his head, and he could only remember the first two letters. These he remembered very well, for he had known them by heart from childhood.

When any broad-winged aeroplane gently soared above their kolkhoz, he and other boys would throw back their heads to follow it with their eyes, remarking casually, as if speaking of an old acquaintance: "It's an IR." The name of Alla's father began with those letters, and the plane he had designed became known by them.

"Hello," repeated the operator.

"Er—please give me the director's office," stuttered Nikita. And again it was not the image of the man that entered his mind, but of the aeroplane glistening in the sun.

"You're through."

"Yes?" queried another voice, no doubt belonging to the director's secretary.

"I want the director, please."

"Who is speaking?"

"Orekhov. From the university."

"Your business?"

"Purely personal."

"Just a minute." There was a shade of surprise in her voice. Then she said: "You will be issued a pass presently."

There were a number of people sitting in the waiting-room. Telephones kept ringing, sometimes two at a time. At least 40 minutes passed before someone said:

"Alexander Semyonovich will see you now."

Taking a deep breath, as if about to plunge into cold water, he entered the office. Nikita saw at once that Alla took after her father, and this added a touch of sentiment to his excitement. Nikita was afraid of sentiment; it put one at a disadvantage. Alla's eyes were as fine as her father's, but his were tired-looking, and anxious. Nikita could see he was worried about something, but it was too late to put off the talk. And so he simply said, as impressively as possible:

"My name is Orekhov, Nikita Ivanovich."

"You're a friend of my daughter's, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Has anything happened to her?" asked Alexander Semyonovich so anxiously that Nikita himself took fright.

"Oh, no!" he hastened to say, adding, in order to calm the fears of this tired man: "She's all right."

Only then did Nikita understand. He had not supposed that Alexander Semyonovich knew his name. But apparently he did, and had assumed, when Nikita phoned from the Pass Bureau, that something had happened to his daughter, and he had been worrying ever since. Worrying terribly. And still he had gone on with his work, receiving people and answering the telephone. . . .

"I'm sorry. I didn't think. . . ." said Nikita impulsively.

"That's all right. So there's nothing wrong?"

"Nothing. She has passed her zoology exam. Botany comes next. We're collecting specimens for our herbarium."

Nikita stopped speaking. He wondered how Alla would ever have the courage to tell this man she had received only a three for zoology. Nikita would see that she took a re-exam.

"A herbarium—dried flowers and plants?" asked Alla's father. "But sit down, Nikita Ivanovich." The look of worry in his eyes was replaced by one of curiosity.

Nikita sat down in silence. The chair was deep and soft. It was dreadful to be sitting there, not knowing how to begin. Alexander Semyonovich, too, said nothing—merely sat there slowly cleaning his pipe. Could it be that he knew all about it and was lying low? Nikita became more and more terrified, and felt that he must begin now or never. He took a deep breath, grasped the broad arms of the chair, half raised himself, and said in a breathless voice:

"I'm in love with Alla. I want to marry her. My father has given his consent. I want to know how you feel about

it." He let go of the arms of the chair and again sank in its depths.

Alexander Semyonovich struck a match, although he had not yet filled his pipe, and watched it burn. When it had gone out, he put it in the ash-tray, rose, walked from the desk to the door and back again, once more went to the door and opened it to say to his secretary:

"I have an important matter to discuss, Olga Petrovna. Go and have your dinner. Nothing pressing? No, I won't need those papers for a while."

Nikita felt encouraged. If Alla's father considered the matter important, he must, on the whole, approve. And it certainly *was* important! And there might be things that needed discussion. Nikita liked Alla's father more and more. He was sure that this man and his father would get on.

Alexander Semyonovich at last got his pipe lit, and sat on the edge of his desk, half facing Nikita.

"Well, tell me how all this came about." He spoke as if he were inquiring how Nikita had caught a chill that turned to pneumonia.

"We met at the university. Last year. On the 20th of August," began Nikita. He made a conscientious effort to recall all the details of the first meeting, but he had been so overwhelmed at the time that the only thing he could remember was how dizzy he had felt and how dry his tongue had gone. So he merely said: "She was copying the time-table of studies."

"Good," said Alexander Semyonovich with a nod.

"She . . ." (the word "she" was pronounced as if it were something holy) "she came up and spoke to me herself. She asked where I came from, and I said from Chuvashia."

"So you're from Chuvashia?" interrupted Alexander Semyonovich. "I was there not so long ago myself. On business. And I had a look at some of the kolkhozes, just

out of curiosity. Fine kolkhozes you have there. Which is yours?"

"The Vanguard."

"I didn't visit that one. I saw The Kozlovka."

"Important people and newspaper reporters are always shown The Kozlovka. But our kolkhoz isn't much behind it," said Nikita proudly.

Neither Nikita nor his father were fond of hearing other kolkhozes praised. But Nikita was glad Alexander Semyonovich had liked Chuvashia. He would see their kolkhoz when he came to visit them, and he would have a good rest there. Thoughts of Chuvashia seemed to be passing through Alexander Semyonovich's mind too, for he said, reminiscingly:

"The first time I went to Chuvashia was—let's see—in 1922. Pretty bad then. Dirt, trachoma. I visited a village named Traki—"

"Two years ago the amateur chorus from Traki took first place in the all-Union competition. We took second place," said Nikita.

"Chorus?" Alexander Semyonovich smiled. "Well, and what did she do after that?" he said, switching back to the original theme.

"On the 21st of August we went to the Conservatoire to hear a Chaikovsky piano concerto."

Alexander Semyonovich had heard about this. One evening Alla had told him about a new student named Orekhov—a tall, handsome boy who had just come to Moscow. He was a Siberian, but it seemed he had lived in Chuvashia since childhood. Alla had undertaken to show him Moscow, where everything amazed him. They went to hear Chaikovsky's first piano concerto and when the orchestra played that place—you know (here Alla hummed a bar or two)—he almost cried. But Alexander Semyonovich didn't mention this to Nikita, who went on

talking, trying to remember everything that might be of the least interest to Alla's father.

After the concert, Alla had taken Nikita to the Red Square. From there they had gone down to the bridge, where they had stood for some time. They could see the lighted windows of the Kremlin from the bridge.

For a while the office was profoundly quiet. Nikita was lost in reminiscences which Alexander Semyonovich would not intrude upon.

Nikita had spent most of the ten days that remained before the beginning of the autumn term with Alla. They went to museums, theatres, concerts.

In a few days Nikita's life had become flooded with a blinding new beauty. Not the natural beauty of forest, field and sky that he knew and loved so well, but the man-made beauty of a wonderful city, with its buildings, and ceaseless traffic. The beauty of paintings, collected and treasured in the city, the beauty of the Conservatoire, and of the Bolshoi Theatre. And all this beauty had entered his life along with Alla. What an extraordinary creature she was! All the wonders and riches of the town were known to her: the simultaneous sweep of fifty bows, creating music that made Nikita want to laugh or cry; the paintings that roused his emotions as if they were life itself. And Alla knew all about these paintings—what artist had painted each one, and whether he was alive or not. She had met the marvellous musicians who performed at the concerts, and had met the authors of books Nikita had read. She knew all the delightful streets here, for she was one of those fortunate girls who had been raised in this city—the finest, the most upright city in the world. And that was another reason why he loved her.

Alexander Semyonovich listened attentively while he spoke. Nikita merely stated facts, as was his manner. But whatever he said was interspersed with: "she thinks",

"she said", she considers", and Alexander Semyonovich could see that Alla was an inseparable part of the joy and astonishment Moscow had brought him. Nikita was filled with a deep respect for people, and he took pride in them.

Alexander Semyonovich recalled what Moscow had been like when he had come to it in 1920. There was no question about it, his generation had done a good job. It was right that Nikita should feel so much at home in Moscow now. And it was right and gratifying that Chuva-shia, once such a backward and remote district, should now send forth happy, radiant-eyed youths like this Ni-kita Orekhov.

At last Nikita finished. He had not mentioned the fact that Fyodor Fyodorovich disliked Alla. Even that could not lessen his love for her. Alexander Semyonovich rose and walked over to Nikita:

"What does she think about it all? Does she love you?"

"She does," replied Nikita.

Of this he had no doubt. Of course Alla loved him. How could it be otherwise? Would she have spent so much time with him and have allowed him to kiss her if she did not love him?

Alexander Semyonovich paced the floor with a heavy tread, his shoulders drooping.

"No," said Alexander Semyonovich, "I won't let her have you."

Nikita rose.

"I won't. That's final. Sit down," he said sharply.

Nikita sat down.

"Everything's a tangle in your mind," said Alexander Semyonovich. "Your thoughts, your joy, Moscow, pic-tures, music—you've identified them all with her. You're a fool. I mean, you're a very clever fellow, but in this mat-ter you're a fool. What kind of a wife will she make you? What is it about her that has captivated you so?"

"I love her," said Nikita firmly, though he felt thoroughly bewildered.

"Very stupid of you. What in the world will you ever do with her? Discuss the latest fashions?"

"But Alla——"

"Don't call her Alla," Alexander Semyonovich interrupted testily. "She's Alexandra—Sasha for short—Sashenka.... That was what I wanted—that's the name we planned."

"Sasha," whispered Nikita to himself. He too would have liked to call her Sasha. Alexandra—Sasha—Sashenka....

"She chose 'Alla' as a name just as she chooses her clothes—and even her thoughts and opinions," said Alexander Semyonovich resentfully. "Just tell her a thing is in fashion and she'll do it or wear it or think it. She has no mind of her own. The very thoughts she thinks are other people's." Nikita could see that it was painful for Alexander Semyonovich to say all this. "And all that talk about art that impressed you so—those aren't her ideas either; picked up along with the usual gossip. She doesn't understand a thing about art. You know a thousand times more about music and painting and books—about everything. And Moscow is much more the place for you than it is for her."

"Why do you say such things about your own daughter?" protested Nikita.

"You love her," said Alexander Semyonovich sympathetically, without a trace of anger. "I can see you do. Never mind. There'll be a certain amount of suffering, but it will pass. It always does. Please believe me. How old are you?"

"Nineteen."

"It will all pass. By the time you're 23. Take my word for it."

"But I don't want it to pass."

"I have often wished for a son like you. If my daughter had grown up into a good, sensible girl, I would have gladly given her to you. I would be happy to see her married to you."

Alexander Semyonovich fell silent. So did Nikita, who was very downcast. It saddened him to watch the suffering of this wise and good man. Alexander Semyonovich paced the floor as if oblivious of Nikita's presence. And Nikita sat in the arm-chair, afraid to move lest he disturb the man's thoughts. Alexander Semyonovich was thinking of him, of this boy who had so unexpectedly come asking him for happiness. And he thought of his Sasha, too. Why was it that only now, on meeting the expectant gaze of this boy who was in love with his daughter, he fully realized what had happened? That only now he could be so ruthlessly frank about himself and her?

Formerly he had thought: how fortunate they are, our children—they have everything, we have done everything possible for them. But she was not fortunate—this spoiled daughter of his, who had become almost a stranger to him. It was this boy with the stubborn line between his brows who was fortunate—blessed with the good fortune which they, the old Bolsheviks, had fought for.

What right had he to have neglected his daughter? He had wronged her. Had wronged himself. Had wronged Nikita. But most of all he had wronged his daughter. It had all come about quite unnoticed. He had married. Loved his wife deeply. A quiet, modest woman with fluffy blond hair. A hospital nurse. How happy they had been in the little house on the edge of town, with the smell of wood-fire coming through the open door of the stove! Every evening he had returned there from his work at the factory to prepare his lessons for night-school. When did things begin to change? He graduated from night-school. Took a college degree. Designed aeroplanes. Saw his

planes take to the air. Soon he was made director of a factory. His wife gave up her job. Just like that. And why? She was tired. Very well, let her have a rest. Then they were given a three-room flat. They bought some furniture: a round table at which friends could sit comfortably, a sideboard, from the depths of which the newly-acquired tea-service glittered. Plenty of chairs—no longer would they have to borrow stools from their neighbours. His wife was overjoyed, made things cosy, made him shift the furniture a dozen times. He too rejoiced that Sasha had a bright, cosy room now where the other little girls could come and play lotto with her in the evenings. And he rejoiced that at last he had a roomy study and would no longer have to edge sideways into his chair at the desk. It was a joy to return to this study after work, to pace the floor as he pondered some new design, knowing that his latest model would soon be having its trial flight, and that he would be down below, on the ground, looking up at it, blinking not only from the sun and the glitter of the wings, but also from sheer joy.

At that time there had been no outlandish tables with sharp corners, nor intimidatingly fragile vases to bother him. There was nothing in the room but his desk, a drawing-board, a wide window-sill on which an old friend of his, a test-pilot, loved to sit, and a bookcase—an old oak bookcase. On the top shelf stood a volume of Pushkin. Very dilapidated, in a brown home-made binding.

The bookcase! That was how it had all started.... He had returned home one evening after four days and nights of work in the designers' office, and discovered he was in the wrong flat. Or wasn't he? He must be—there was no bookcase, there was no floor space. A suite had moved in. A bedroom suite. "A suite," hissed Alexander Semyonovich with loathing.

"Know what a suite is?" he suddenly asked Nikita.
"No."

"May you never find out!"

Alexander Semyonovich resumed his silent meditation.

It was a big suite of Karelian birch, with ornate metal mesh at the head and foot of the bed, in which fat carved leaves, painted green, were entwined. And there was already dust in their graven lines. The bed was the size of a town square. He entered the room, knocked his shins against a night-table, stumbled over a hassock. Then he glanced into the dining-room. His old desk was jammed into the corner between sideboard and window. Once more he had to edge into the chair.

At that moment Alla had come into the dining-room. Twelve-year-old Alla. She was wearing a long silk dressing-gown. Why? Why should a child of 12 be wearing a dressing-gown like that?

"Where's Mother?" he asked.

"Gone to an antique shop."

"Why?"

"Why?" Alla had echoed, astonished at his ignorance. "They've promised to find a lamp-shade for her. One must have a suitable lamp-shade in one's bedroom, don't you know."

"Where's my bookcase?"

"They took it away. It's old. It spoiled the whole flat."

"But you don't understand," he said. "You don't understand, Alla. Mother must have forgotten. That bookcase.... Where's my Pushkin?"

"Here," said Alla. "Mother is going to have it rebound. It's a very old edition. You won't find it anywhere now."

As he picked up the volume a flood of memories swept over him. Dear, distant memories. Memories of the old school-teacher who had died when Alexander was in the third form. It was he who had left him that bookcase. His father and elder brother had carried it home. The windows

of their room had been reflected in its glass doors, and this made the crowded room seem lighter. At that time nothing had stood in the bookcase but Pushkin—that same volume. The teacher had left instructions that the rest of his books be divided among the other pupils.

That was when it had started! *That* was when he should have taken Alla by the shoulders, made her change her clothes, explained to her why it was wrong to get rid of the bookcase, and never let her escape from his influence again. But he had gone away and spent the night on a cold leather sofa in his office at the plant.

Why had he gone away instead of throwing out all that furniture? Why had he accepted the situation? Probably because at that time he could think of nothing but his latest aircraft design, the best he had yet conceived.

That was how it had begun. And it had gone on and on. A four-room flat and a small house in the country. Then a large house in the country. More suites of furniture.

What now remained to him? Where were his friends, his old friends? Those unassuming, affectionate, real men? All lost. Who were these foppish young men he was always coming across in his own house? God only knows what people ate nowadays—mouldy, wormy cheese and anchovies. But why should *he* have to eat that cheese? No use asking for a bowl of buckwheat porridge in that house! And his wife? He had no wife. A strange blond woman sauntered about the flat in a dressing-gown, talking nonsense. That was not his wife. His wife had been swallowed up by a polished mahogany wardrobe. And his daughter? He had no daughter. Once he had had a little girl named Sasha. Long-legged, with blond plaits. When he came home from work she would climb up on his knee, breathe into his ear, and pour out her quaint confidences. Where was that little girl now? She no longer existed. Now there was only Alla. High heels, pyjamas,



some funny-looking curls on the top of her head. Had he done anything to save his daughter? He thought he had. But not enough. Not nearly enough. He had tried not letting them use the car. What an idea! His wife immediately had a heart attack. He tried speaking to Alla: "Why do you go about in a dressing-gown? What do you need all those knick-knacks for?" But she had only looked at him uncomprehendingly and started whimpering, and he, fool that he was, had felt sorry for her. Sorry, indeed!

Overworked? Even so he had had no right . . . he had had no right to give up his daughter. . . .

He came to a halt in front of Nikita.

"I've trained hundreds like you—thousands. But I couldn't bring up my own daughter."

Nikita rose, took a cigarette from the box lying on the table, and, for the first time in his life, began smoking.

"I'm going to marry her anyway, Alexander Semyonovich," he said.

"You're young and foolish and in love," said Alexander Semyonovich wearily. "You simply can't imagine the hash she'll make of your life."

"Oh, no she won't, Alexander Semyonovich."

Nikita was standing in front of him. He had very broad shoulders and a tanned, intelligent brow, showing beneath a boyish lock of fair hair. His mouth was strong, and so was his chin.

"I won't let anybody make hash of my life. And she'll change. You'll see. She's only spoiled."

"So you think you can manage her?" asked Alexander Semyonovich, secretly hopeful.

"Why not? Of course I can. She's an intelligent girl; she'll understand. Don't worry. And then there'll be children and that will make her take life more seriously."

"Children!" Alexander Semyonovich laughed.

He laughed not only because the idea of the young Nikita and Sasha being parents seemed absurd, but also

because, as he looked at the stubborn chin of this youth, he suddenly found himself believing that everything would come right. He imagined that once more his house would come to look like home and they would make buckwheat porridge again, for you couldn't feed that strapping fellow on cheese and jelly. And his little Sasha would return to him—quiet, domestic, without the curls sticking out on the top of her head, and would ask him how his work was going. And for all he knew, he really might have a grandson. And his wife would settle down and stop dyeing her hair (she was quite grey, and he was sure grey hair would suit her). And together they would throw out all those clumsy suites. And he would go for his holiday, not to a health resort, but to a kolkhoz, to visit Nikita's father, and at last he would have a chance to fish to his heart's content. . . .

Nikita glanced at the clock. Time to be going.

"Are you in a hurry?"

"I have to catch a train."

"Then run along," said Alexander Semyonovich. "Run along. And if you can manage her, marry her."

Nikita smiled.

"That's what I'll tell Alla," he said.

"Do."

Alexander Semyonovich stood gazing after him for a long time.

CHAPTER 14

Nikita was in luck. Near the station he got a lift in a lorry that took him over half the way, so that he arrived at the biological station while everyone was still asleep, even Fyodor Fyodorovich. Nikita wondered if he too should not take a little nap, but instead he strolled about the grounds, going over in his mind what he would say to Alla later in the day. Suddenly he realized that he was

shy, that he dreaded the talk. Perhaps he should write her a letter.

Nikita went deep into the woods: no one must see him writing that letter.

He lay on the grass. Over his head a titmouse chirped monotonously; his face almost brushed a wild strawberry, large and red, with a chunk out of one side where a snail had dined.

It shocked him to see his most secret and hallowed thoughts entrusted to paper, written down as plain as lecture-notes.

"You have no idea how I love you. You will only realize that when we are both old. Don't be afraid to join your life with mine. I won't let anyone harm you. I want you to be always smiling. And I'll do everything to make this possible. See if I don't!"

Nikita loved Alla more than ever after having met her father. He knew now that there had been such a person as little Sasha, and she became as beloved and important to Nikita as she had been to her father.

"I have spoken to your father. He gave his consent."

Nikita lay on the grass and said over and over to himself the tender words he would have liked to have said to her. But he could not bring himself to write them down. He ended the letter by asking her to meet him at the chaff-chaff's tree at ten o'clock of the following evening.

On the slope leading down to the well he ran into Alla—the last thing he had expected. There they stood, face to face, on the narrow path. It was very still in the woods. Nikita clutched the letter in his fist and said not a word.

"Good morning, Nikita," said Alla at last. Her fluffy tangled hair half covered her forehead.

"A wonderful morning," replied Nikita. "Here, read this."

He thrust the crumpled letter into her hands and waited. For a moment it seemed to him that he was equal to telling her everything that was written in the letter. But the moment passed. Turning abruptly, he rushed down the path, glad to feel the wind on his burning cheeks. He even lacked the courage to glance back.

When Nikita got back to the students' living quarters, he found Fyodor Fyodorovich already there. Looking more steadily at Nikita than the latter found quite agreeable, the professor said curtly:

"Show me how to wind puttees."

Evidently Fyodor Fyodorovich did not like the inspired expression of Nikita's face. Nikita fell to winding his puttees with a will, bending so low that Fyodor Fyodorovich said:

"Excuse me, but are you winding them with your teeth, or what?"

But the worst moment had passed. When Nikita raised his head anyone might have thought his face was so red from having stooped such a long time. Besides being red, it wore an injured expression. He was sure Fyodor Fyodorovich knew perfectly well what had taken place and that was why he was so exacting. But this was not true. Fyodor Fyodorovich was exacting to everyone, always testing straps on rucksacks, looking at boots, never letting the students alone.

No one had a worse time on that hike than Yura Dozhidkov. It was not easy to fool Fyodor Fyodorovich into believing that everything was in marching order. But Yura could not overcome his slothfulness, and the results of his pretence began to show themselves after about five kilometres of walking. Jumping over a ditch, Yura discovered that his rucksack was slipping off his shoulders. In another kilometre rusks began to fall out of it. Professor Lopatin looked back and saw Yura picking up rusks, but instead of coming to a halt, he strode on

faster than ever. By the end of the sixth kilometre Yura had a sore spot on his left heel, and after about twelve kilometres he was sure he could go no further. But everyone went on, and so Yura went on, too. He kept stumbling, hitching up the slipping rucksack with his elbow, every now and then tugging at his boot, which was wrinkled over the foot, rubbing his heel worse than ever. Yura was the picture of woe. Gromada and Stepan strode on in silence, keeping step. Nikita came last of all, but it was quite evident that he had fallen behind not because he was tired, but because he did not wish to talk.

Yura gazed at him with unconcealed envy. In addition to his rucksack, Nikita was carrying a pot for making porridge, and still he walked with ease. The pot was big and must have been very heavy. But Nikita carried it as if it were no heavier than the tin pails with perforated lids used for catching frogs.

But it was the girls who made Yura feel worst of all. They walked briskly along behind Vena Vasilievna. Lopatin had allowed only Marina, Katya and Lyuba to march with them, adding Varya after long pleading. He had been afraid she would soon tire. But Varya kept up an unhurried, easy pace, and her face was joyous and preoccupied. Katya stepped out like a soldier. Such a march was nothing to her! It was obvious that the plump Lyuba, whose face was red from the heat, suffered most, but even she did not lag behind.

Victor Belevsky had often been on marches and expeditions, and was untouched by the excitement felt by the second-year students. He looked compact and absorbed, as if his thoughts were somewhere far away. He was not going to the lake to ring sea-gulls, his business was to find nests suitable for the transference of fledglings.

"Well, found anything, Victor?" asked Lopatin affectionately, catching up Belevsky.

"Yes," came the monosyllabic reply.

"I keep thinking, Fyodor Fyodorovich," said Gromada meditatively, as if picking up the conversation, "what if we do this: catch the birds while they are resting among the trees of parks and woods during their spring migration. Then keep them a fortnight in cages. One of the reasons they migrate is because they have put on fat. We'll keep them on a low diet; they'll stay thin and their instinct will not act. The term of the migration instinct will come to an end. And what will begin? The nesting period. Then we'll let them out. What d'you say to that?"

Although he tried to speak calmly, it was obvious that Gromada was excited. Looking at his companions, he saw two pairs of eyes fixed on his face. One pair was youthful, ardent; the other—old, unimpassioned. The youthful eyes belonged to Lopatin.

"Utopian idea," said Belevsky casually.

"Why?"

"They'll stay behind, but they won't nest."

"Come now, I think Ivan Ostapovich has something there!" said Lopatin eagerly. "Let's try, Victor. What d'you think?"

Unable to contain himself, Gromada strode rapidly ahead of them. He could not bear to hear Fyodor Fyodorovich speak in such friendly tones to Belevsky. Surely he must have noticed that Victor, for some reason or other, no longer cared whether the birds nested in the new plantations or not.

"By the way," asked Lopatin when Gromada was out of hearing, "why didn't you come forward after the lecture? Surely Gromada would have let you speak?"

Belevsky shrugged his shoulders.

"Shumsky must have objected. It was easy enough to guess what I would have said. Sorry, Fyodor Fyodorovich, I think I see a nest!" and he swerved rapidly into the woods, pulling the map out of its case as he went.

Lopatin looked after him benevolently.

As the students marched, the intervals between them were growing ever wider. It was obvious that everyone was very tired.

But Boris was as lively as a puppy, running ahead, dropping to his knees to examine a burrow, climbing trees. Boris expressed friendly sympathy for Yura, and Yura felt that this was the last straw.

"Tired, Comrade Dozhdikov?" inquired Boris respectfully. "Wait a minute! There's a spoon falling out of your rucksack, let me put it right."

He thrust the spoon back and dashed forward with a skipping gait.

But when they began walking over open ground Boris, too, quieted down. There was less and less talking, the sun blazed pitilessly, and a dry dusty heat rose from the earth.

At the end of another hour and a half they came to a small stream.

"Want to drink?" asked Lopatin.

"No!" replied the students in chorus.

"Don't you?"

Lopatin's glance swept over the weary, sweating, dusty countenances.

"No," said Lyuba, moistening her dry lips with her tongue.

"No," echoed Yura staunchly.

"Well, I'm longing for a drink," said Lopatin breezily. "Forty minutes' halt. And then there'll only be five kilometres to the lake. We'll walk in the shade, and we'll hardly notice it."

Their halt over, they proceeded from the stream to the lake. Night began to fall rapidly. A heavy black cloud crept towards them from the west. There was a distant roll of thunder, and lightning flashed from behind the woods.

"Well, here we are. After all, it's practically next door to the biological station, isn't it?" said Lopatin.

It was not really a lake, though it once had been. It was a marsh, a colony for sea-gulls, and the students visited it every year to ring fledglings. Dark and spreading fir-trees covered the steep banks rising from it.

"We'll light a fire in this glade," said Lopatin, "and make porridge. And now take off your boots."

Yura collapsed on the grass. When he had taken off his boots he heard a voice full of concern behind him, saying:

"My dear boy, however did you walk?"

The rubbed places on Yura's heels were bleeding.

"You took such a long time adjusting your puttees!" exclaimed Lopatin pityingly as he extracted a tube of vaseline from his pouch. "I saw your rucksack was slipping, but I was sure your feet were all right. And you went on without complaining. Put the vaseline here, and here."

Yura smeared the sore places with vaseline and looked away guiltily.

Victor and Nikita had gone to the nearest kolkhoz for milk. Vera Vasilievna was getting supper ready with the help of Lyuba and Marina. Stepan and Katya were busy lighting the fire. Boris was fast asleep not far from a fir-tree, his cheek laid against his sunburnt, grimy hand.

The clouds were still creeping overhead, not dispersing as they passed, but getting ever darker and denser, till at last they had covered the remnants of pink sky in the west. The firs rustled ever louder and more ominously.

Vera Vasilievna, noticing that Varya had suddenly turned very pale, ordered her to take a rest. But Varya's pallor was not due to fatigue. She was afraid of thunderstorms.

"Don't light a fire! Everyone to the firs, please, but don't sit under the tall ones," Varya heard Lopatin say.

In the dazzling flashes of lightning his face seemed unfamiliar. Clasping her hands tightly, she was just going to follow Lopatin in his search for shelter when her eyes fell on the sleeping Boris. Trying not to wake him, she moved him close under the tree. When he was settled, she glanced round. Lopatin was seated beneath a fir-tree, his hands clasped round his knees, looking extremely happy and comfortable. To look at him you would say that there could be no better way for people to rest. Soon others joined him on the ground beneath the fir-tree. Vera Vasilievna distributed slices of bread. Lyuba sat down beside Varya and handed her a hard-boiled egg.

On the surface of the lake below them an urgent wind was stirring the reeds and making them bend before it. The wind rose higher and there was a swift shower of fine rain. But it merely drummed on the branches and slipped down the needles, without falling on those beneath. Nikita and Victor came running up, wet but contented. Varya eagerly gulped down the cold milk, clutching the mug with chilled fingers. There was a mingled smell of pine-needles and grass. Suddenly she heard measured, calm breathing at her side. Fyodor Fyodorovich had gone to sleep. Varya drew a profound sigh of relief.

"At last the rain has come," said Katya in her caressing voice.

"Good rain," agreed Nikita in bass tones. "Just what the corn needs. The corn is getting a good drink."

Once more quiet reigned beneath the fir-tree. The only sounds were the chewing of bread, the crunching of cucumbers, and the rain striking on the pine-needles.

"It's not a bit frightening in the woods," said Marina. "I've never been in the woods at night before."

"What's there to be frightened of?" countered Katya. "Nothing but friends all round." She repeated: "Nothing but friends!" and laughed. A happy, ringing laugh.

"Go to sleep, sparrows," murmured Lopatin drowsily, and again his even breathing could be heard.

Varya had a vague sense of extreme hunger, but the next minute she was asleep, pressed against Lyuba.

Varya was awakened by a sensation of cold. Her left side was freezing. But the sleeping Lyuba, on the other side, exuded heat like a stove. Varya's movement caused Lyuba to start up in fright, so that she knocked her head against a branch and they were sprinkled by icy rain-drops. Varya looked round. Lopatin had gone. She had no idea what time it was, for the sky was grey. It was not, however, veiled by the ponderous clouds of the evening, but by a light grey film of fluffy cloud.

Nikita was awakened by the sound of laughter and by drops running swiftly down his face. Now everyone was shaking the branches of the fir, just for fun. Lopatin soon came back and sent them all to their posts. The students surrounded the marsh, each one being assigned a sector, the boundary of which was fixed by a tree at either end. The task was to count the gulls which flew between these trees.

Nikita flung himself down on low-lying ground. Opposite him between two high fir-trees stood two others which were not so high but had spreading branches, those which had sheltered them from the rain. The gulls flew over his head with harsh cries, their wings cutting the air with whistling sounds. Mosquitoes buzzed with dreary indefatigability. They stung Nikita unmercifully, but he fought them off and went on counting gulls.

At last the grey cloud-film suspended above the ravine was torn apart. Fluffy scraps of cloud retreated, retreated hurriedly. A shaft of sunlight fell straight through the vivid blue rift. It fell diagonally, gilding the tree-tops

and the edge of the ravine, cutting through the grey, misty air, and blazing on the high wet grass. It looked solid enough to touch, to gather up in one's fist, or hold in a cupped palm, like water. Nikita thought that Alla must have read his letter by now, and, like him, was not asleep. She would be sitting on the steps of the porch, waiting for evening to come. A cloud far away behind the woods had also dispersed, and a shaft of sunlight just like the one here was probably falling straight on Alla, warming her very being, so that she was at this moment warm and joyous.

The whistle which meant Lopatin was summoning the students was heard in the distance. The morning flight was over and Vera Vasilievna took everybody's lists, so as to calculate the number of full-grown gulls on the lake. Katya and Lyuba were making porridge over a fire. The porridge smelled smoky. Mint and other woodland herbs which Lopatin assured them were both healthful and delicately flavoured, were cast into the kettle. Perhaps these herbs were healthful, but they were bitter. Even so, the students were sure they had never enjoyed a meal as they enjoyed this porridge and tea.

After breakfast they all went into the swamp to ring fledglings. The swamp was choked with reeds, and with bushes that had gleaming, rounded leaves. On closer inspection sharp spikes were observed on the underside of those leaves. They were no mere prickles; each had a hook at the end, and these hooks were covered with fuzz.

"Very prickly," observed Yura. He went with the rest, though Lopatin had tried to persuade him to stay behind and help with the dinner.

"I know I deserve to be left behind, Fyodor Fyodorovich," said Yura, "but to cook the dinner—really, you know!"

Nobody wanted to cook. Lots had to be drawn. Gromada drew a slip with the prosaic inscription: "Porridge". Without a word expressive of his disappointment, he took one look at the pot, to the bottom of which clung fragments of burnt porridge, and stated that he would go to the lake for clean water to scour it. Marina, looking round, met his eye and frowned. Gromada picked up the pot, waved his hand, and set out for the waterside.

By midday there were no clouds left in the sky, a fact which everyone regretted. The sun scorched their heads and shoulders, while their feet were freezing. Every now and then somebody's foot plunged into icy water protected from the heat of the sun by a thick cushion of grass and moss. At some places they had to go on all fours.

"The swamp's still young," said Lopatin. "The going's better through old swamps, they give one some support, and this one isn't a bit firm. Crawl, Yura, crawl, don't stand up!" he was shouting a minute later to Yura, who gladly dropped to his knees—it suited him much better to go on all fours than to advance in the conventional manner. He crawled on in happy oblivion till he was again stopped by a cry from Lopatin: "Careful! You're crushing a fledgling!"

Yura froze to the spot in alarm and extracted from beneath his body a half-suffocated, considerably mauled fledgling. The fledgling chirped furiously and tried to peck Yura's hand. But Yura carefully fitted a metal ring above the slender, scaly claw. The fledgling was as slippery as a fish, but warm beneath its cold feathers. Yura liked this work. He had even begun surreptitiously to compose verses about the sea-gull with the ring on its foot flying to remote lands, where everyone knew where it came from, and envied it when it flew home.

Varya was so light that the clumps of earth sprung

resilient beneath her feet. She crawled out to the middle of the swamp, when she suddenly saw, not far away, the terrified face of Lyuba. Lyuba had fallen in, but was not calling for help, only struggling silently, clinging to the turf with her hands. This was just what she ought not to have done. The turf gave way and Lyuba was gradually being sucked down. Varya crept up to within arm's length; it was dangerous to go nearer, for they might both be sucked down. For some time she sought a means of reaching her, circling cautiously, groping at the damp yielding moss, gradually making her way forward in places where the clumps of dry earth were higher and firmer. At first she did not even realize that both she and Lyuba were in danger. But suddenly she caught sight of Lopatin hurrying towards them with a long pole in his hands, and his expression told her that the situation was critical. Just then Varya came within reach of Lyuba's hand. Tensing her muscles, she seized it and began slowly crawling back, drawing Lyuba after her. Lopatin watched them in silence and only drew a breath of relief when they had both got to the bank. Lyuba was scratched all over and wet to her waist. For a long time she lay still beside Varya, panting helplessly. Then she said solemnly:

"Thanks, Varya, for Mother's sake."

All this time Varya had not once come across Nikita. They were working at opposite ends of the swamp. She would have loved Nikita to see her saving Lyuba's life.

Somehow the way back to the biological station was easier than the way to the lake had been, and the return march took less time, despite the fact that the day had been a tiring one, and they had not had much sleep.

It was quite dark by the time they got back. Gromada, Stepan and Yura went to bed at once. The girls wanted to, too, but Alla and Zina were sitting talking on the porch. Lyuba, Varya and Katya sat down beside them and Marina went into the house alone.

Nikita wandered about the camp, not knowing what to do with himself. In two hours he would be the happiest man in the world. Alla would say: "I love you, and I will be your wife." As soon as they finished their work here, they would get married and go to visit his father. Alla's father would take a holiday and join them, and ever afterwards their lives would go on together. The university would give them a separate room in the hostel, as it did to all married students; he did not wish to live at Alla's, though he felt sorry for her father.

Quite unaccountably, as if drawn by some invisible charm, he found himself near the little house where Alla lived. From the porch came the sound of girls' voices. Nikita was about to continue on his way, when he heard his own name spoken.

He recognized Alla's voice: "So I'm to be married, just like that! He's even spoken to my father! Did you ever hear of anything like it?"

Nikita sank down on the moss, one leg twisted painfully under him, but he did not move a muscle.

"I thought you'd marry that engineer," said Zina Rizhikova wistfully. "He's very good-looking. And talented. So young—and a Stalin Prize winner.... And he has a flat, and you'll have it all to yourself. Nikita's a nice boy, of course, but he's only a kid...."

"What nonsense you talk, Zina!" said Lyuba crossly. "What has a flat got to do with it? The main thing in such questions is love. Nikita will be a great scientist some day. And he's an awfully nice boy. Go ahead and marry him, Alla. That is, if you love him. I would, if I loved him. But I don't intend to get married until I finish the university."

"I can't make up my mind," said Alla. "Sometimes I love him, sometimes I don't. He's kind of strange. But the letter he wrote is simply priceless: 'You'll only realize how much I love you when we are both old.'" Alla

laughed, and the laughter which had once delighted Nikita so, now cut him to the quick.

"How can you betray a confidence like this?" It was Varya, speaking so softly that Nikita scarcely recognized her voice. "Everything you say is sheer treachery to Nikita," she continued louder. "How can you talk like that, girls? And you, Alla? Such a letter, such a person, such happiness—all for you. And you laugh and tell everybody about it. How *dare* you!" Varya's voice rose to a cry and she ran into the house, banging the door behind her.

The cry brought Nikita to his senses. He rose without caring whether they heard him or not and went into the woods. He felt utterly weary and threw himself down on the ground, where he lay motionless, his face pressed against the damp moss. He did not think of Alla. Hard, horny thoughts jostled in his mind. For some reason he remembered going fishing on the Volga as a boy with his friend Andrei. While hauling in the net in the evening, Andrei had leaned awkwardly out of the boat, and his big round watch had fallen into the water. His father had left the watch with Andrei when he went to the front. Large ripples broke the surface of the water, then faded, leaving it smooth and dark again, with a few stars clearly reflected in it.... There was no point in diving after the watch—the boat was in the middle of the Volga, at one of its deepest parts.

When an hour or so had passed, Andrei had said: "I suppose it's still ticking." They thought of the watch lying on the bottom of the river under a load of black water, its little cog-wheels still turning. And all for nothing....

Nikita's face was drenched with dew. He lay still. He could hear his heart throbbing. Above his head the fir-boughs made a dark, motionless canopy.

The grass rustled nearby, and a light dress flashed past. It was Alla on her way to the chiff-chaff's nest....

Two days later Alla's father got a letter containing the following words written in a large round hand:

My dear Alexander Semyonovich,

I am sorry, but I cannot marry Alla. It seems she doesn't love me.

Yours,

Nikita Orekhov.

And a week later a letter was received in Chuvashia.

The old man read it in the evening, having carried it about in his pocket all day. Then he took the precious green stones out of the chest and held them so long on the dark, hard palm of his hand that they became warm. Ivan Trifonovich wiped every stone with a handkerchief in which he then wrapped his wife's necklace, before returning it to the bottom of the chest.

CHAPTER 15

Varya simply could not sleep. Her mind was filled with restless, jumbled thoughts, the kind that come when one lies awake because one is upset, and not because there is no need of sleep. If only she could stop thinking of what had happened on the porch! Now she remembered her trip to town with Gromada, now Fyodor Fyodorovich, as comfortable under the fir-tree as if he were in his own bed. Her thoughts kept going back to their conversation on the way to The Streams Kolkhoz. In her drowsy state she saw him as the woodsman in the fairy-tales her mother used to tell her, a kind wizard, lord over the birds and beasts and flowers. All of a sudden she remembered how he had stopped and whistled, and how his whistle was answered by a bird flying towards him from out of the bushes. He really was a wizard!

But this hodge-podge of impressions was dominated by one all-important thought: her big problem was decided.

And now that the decision was made, she no longer had a right to waver, to waste time cogitating and deliberating. Varya realized that it was no mere chance which had led her to choose animal-breeding in general and fox-breeding in particular as her speciality. Persistently, but without applying undue pressure, Fyodor Fyodorovich had guided her to this decision. As she lay tossing in bed, Varya once more explained to herself how important the profession she had chosen was for the happiness of mankind.

What a pleasure it was to dream of those vast spaces and untold riches over which she would some day rule as Fyodor Fyodorovich ruled over the forest! As she recalled her talk with him, Varya clearly envisioned the clumsy beavers with their fur shining in the light of the moon, the bright eyes of sables glancing out between the trunks of pine-trees, the swift shadow of a white fox, its shadow the only thing visible against the white snow.

Oh, yes, there would be fur in plenty—for flyers and explorers, and for smartly dressed girls. It was her job to see to this. And furs must be cheap. Then every girl could choose the coat which suited her best. Varya and Lyuba had gone shopping once, that winter. Lyuba needed a fur collar for her coat, and Varya mustered up courage to try on a sealskin coat. Her face had immediately looked rosy, and her eyes shone. No doubt a coat like that would have suited Alla very well, but Alla had once remarked that one couldn't get real seal-skin, and she wouldn't wear imitation. So she had bought herself a coat of Persian lamb. And it hadn't suited her; it made her look older than she was. Anyhow, Varya didn't like Persian lamb. Somehow it was cold and heartless. Nothing but sheepskin, after all. And Alla's coat had had a glaring defect. It seemed all the time to be

bleating: "I'm very d-e-ee-ear." But she mustn't think about Alla. What had she been thinking of before? Oh, yes—furs! Persian lamb. Seal was quite different—warm, light, full of life. Besides, seals were very amusing creatures. Once more Varya remembered how she and Lyuba had gone shopping. The shop was probably about the tenth they had been in. They simply couldn't find a collar that was both cheap and attractive. They were all either expensive or ugly. And in this particular shop everything was expensive, and all the collars were lovely. Varya and Lyuba had stood at the counter looking at furs, trying to identify the animals by their skins—excellent practice for zoologists.

"What are you looking for, girls?" asked the saleswoman.

They told her.

"Cheap and nice," she repeated thoughtfully. Then she suddenly climbed up a ladder to the very top shelf, drew out a pelt and came down again, slapping the fur on the counter with a graceful turn of her wrist. It was brown, shot through with yellow. Fluffy. And there were cuffs as well as a collar.

"Wolverene," said Varya.

The saleswoman looked at her with respect.

"Very rare. You're in luck, girls."

Lyuba raced over to the cash-desk.

"Fancy, cuffs as well!"

Even Alla had admitted that it was handsome and unusual fur. Only a bit harsh.

"But it'll wear," countered Lyuba.

Lyuba had calculated that the wolverene must last six years—till she had taken her master's degree. True, there was a possibility that the squirrel coat of which Lyuba dreamed would come to her much sooner—her brother who worked in an automobile plant had told her he had been named candidate for a prize.

"If I get it, you shall have a fur coat, Lyuba," he had told her.

Lyuba's brother was only a year older than she was, but he was very strict and serious—like Nikita Orekhov.

At this moment the door was partly opened and someone in a light dress slipped into the room. It was Alla. The happy dreams Varya had been indulging in were rudely interrupted. She felt a pang of pain and bitterness, and turned her face to the wall so as not to see Alla.

"Well, how was it?" whispered Zina. She, too, had not been asleep.

"Oh, leave me alone," said Alla and went over to her bed.

Varya heard the rustle of a silk dress being whipped off, and the clatter of slippers being kicked off.

Varya could no longer control her thoughts: the conversation on the porch, Alla's laughter, and the way the girls had discussed Nikita's letter all came back to her. What would she not have given to have had such a letter from him, to have had such fond words addressed to herself! She would never have breathed a word of it to a soul.

Alla lay motionless in her bed. She had just seen Nikita. Varya tried to make herself think of foxes, of her work, of the future. But she thought only of Nikita. She tried not to. She tried to fight down her love, so great and so hopeless. She had been fighting it down for a long time.

She had fallen in love with him the day Nikita had failed in his literature examination and had sat in the zoological museum—so big, so handsome, and so miserable.

Varya raised her head and saw Alla re-reading Nikita's letter by the light of pocket-torch which she shaded with her hand. What happiness that must be—with everyone else asleep, to read and re-read his letter by

the light of a torch! Varya well understood that Alla could not talk to Zina after just having seen Nikita. Such an experience must have transformed her. Surely she would never again laugh at him in front of others. No doubt he had said wonderful things to her, had taken her in his arms and kissed her. . . . Yes, perhaps Alla was only now fully appreciating the happiness that had fallen to her lot. Varya had known for some time that Nikita loved Alla—he made no secret of it. He was too upright, he could not pretend. He loved frankly, proudly. He loved her for all time, just as Varya loved him. And all that was so incalculably precious to her, now belonged to Alla.

One day Nikita had smiled at Varya. She had blushed crimson in the light of his smile, so frank and friendly, but the next moment she had seen that he was looking past her; she had merely chanced to step between him and Alla. The smile that had taken her breath away was meant for Alla. Oh, that she had never seen that smile! She knew only too well that Nikita would go right through his studies hardly speaking a word to her, except about university affairs. And he would probably marry Alla soon.

Of course, if she really loved Nikita, she ought to be glad for him—happy that he loved and was loved. At least that was how people capable of "looking at themselves from the outside" would feel. But Varya could not "look at herself from the outside" just now, try as she might.

This was a special time. It was Alla she was looking at from the outside. That Alla should be the girl Nikita loved not only hurt her. It disappointed her. Alla was not worthy of his love.

Never before had Varya passed such severe judgement on Alla. She had not allowed herself to do so, fearing that her jealousy would make her unfair. But now she was ruthless. Alla had no right to take Nikita away from

her. Or else she must change and become worthy of him.

Alla turned out her torch, sat up, heaved a profound sigh and lay down again. As if one could sleep with his letter under the pillow!

Varya told herself that she mustn't think about it any more. Alla could not change Nikita: he would change her. His love would reform her; no one could live beside him without growing better. Nikita was a real person. He could not have made a mistake. If he loved Alla, she must be worthy of his love. But what about Varya's love? Ah, well.... All people have something in their lives which gives them both happiness and sorrow. Let him never know that she loved him. Let him be happy.

And she began to think of the next day when they would go to the woods, with flowers all round, and a blue sky overhead, and Fyodor Fyodorovich smiling genially, and Lyuba chirping incessantly. She felt better.

For a second Varya wondered if it were not time to go to sleep, but she impatiently dismissed the thought. Sleep, when for the first time in her life she was seeing things in their true light? Oh, no!

Some day, many years later, she would meet Nikita, and he would say: "You know, Varya..." No, he would call her Varyusha. "You know, Varyusha, it's a pity I never noticed you when we were students. You're such a fine person." And they would sit and talk, and the moon would sail over their heads. It was cold on the moon, and the only thing that grew there was red grass, like seaweed, like—what was it?—*Delesseria*. Varya had been asked about red seaweed at the last exam, and she had forgotten to mention *Delesseria*. Probably because there was nothing but a little footnote in small type about it in their text-book.

Alla raised herself on one elbow and gazed at the sleeping Varya. It was growing light, and she could see

Varya's face very well—long lashes, delicately flushed cheeks, and unformed babyish mouth.

Alla got up and went to the window to feel the cool air on her wet cheeks.

She could not imagine why Nikita had not met her at the chiff-chaff's nest. It worried her. She had a vague feeling of guilt. She remembered how angry Varya had been with her; but why should Nikita be angry? She envied Varya her ability to dream of the future, to make friends, and to be happy.

CHAPTER 16

Nikita Orekhov went to work in the laboratory of Professor Sharov. The work on the feeding of frogs was over, and Lopatin thought it was time Nikita did some serious work on the morphology of rodents.

At first Sharov had not wanted to have Nikita work in his laboratory. He was busy as it was. A new pupil means a great expenditure of strength and energy. And Sharov was incapable of undertaking anything lightly. But Lopatin had insisted.

"He's gifted, I tell you," he said persuasively. "Why, I even grudge him to you. But I make the sacrifice for the sake of science. He's single-minded, a fanatic."

Sharov shrugged his shoulders.

"Since you praised him so, I've been watching him. I can't see anything special in him. A typical student."

"Of course he's typical," said Lopatin, firing up. "You never understand. Typical students are talented nowadays."

Having won Sharov over, Lopatin informed Nikita of the change.

Nikita received the news glumly. It was cruel. Just now, when everything was so hard for him. Nikita was certain Fyodor Fyodorovich knew of his affair with Alla. And indeed he did. The professor only had to glance at Nikita to understand everything. And evidently he understood what Nikita felt now, for after one look at his imploring blue eyes Professor Lopatin said soothingly:

"That's all right, after you've had a stiff course with him you'll come back to me. You'll know all about the field vole then."

Nikita reluctantly handed over his fledgling charges to Marina Dimkova.

Sharov watched his new pupil with satisfaction. Nikita studied the morphology of voles diligently and conscientiously and soon surmounted the difficulties of systematics.

Sharov considered that very few students could attain Korenev's precision in research, but Nikita showed himself to be still more thorough.

Very soon, however, Nikita's conduct began to cause his new teacher anxiety. And it was all because Sharov had been incautious enough to let Nikita leave the laboratory. Near one of the best fields belonging to The Streams Kolkhoz, Nikita discovered a large colony of voles. And now he turned up in the laboratory, thoroughly upset, and flung on the table the voles he had caught and killed.

"Look at that, Nikolai Alexandrovich," he complained. "Tell me what to do with them."

Sharov explained to Nikita that the struggle with voles was an economic matter, the state was taking various measures, and in this district voles did not develop on a large scale. Nikita knew that himself, but every day he became more and more mutinous.

"That's all true, but there may be exceptions, mayn't there?" he objected. "I wish you'd come and see for yourself what they're up to, Nikolai Alexandrovich," he

said. "Perhaps they haven't developed on a large scale, but there are plenty of them here. And more every day. And you know what fine wheat they have at The Streams. Every ear of corn is a beauty. Do come and take a look one morning."

Korenev listened to Nikita's excited words, and only shrugged his shoulders silently.

But Nikita managed to persuade Sharov to go to the field with him. It was still dark when they set out. They went through a copse of young trees.

Nikita led the professor to a place at the edge of the woods which was evidently familiar to him, and told him to wait: soon he would see for himself what was going on here. Ignoring his wife's admonitions to protect himself against colds and rheumatism, Sharov let himself down on the dew-soaked grass. It was a long time since he had been in a wood at dawn.

Somewhere in the distance a bird was uttering sharp cries. Sharov caught himself wondering what bird it was—he had forgotten. He lay in the wet grass and looked, not into the burrow from which, Nikita assured him, a vole was sure to emerge in a minute, but overhead, at the sky, which was just getting light.

He lay thinking of the fresh, still dawns, the bird-songs, woodland smells he had missed of recent years. He had got too much accustomed to his home, he had become inert. And yet he was still brisk and well, always surrounded by young people, and no one but himself prevented him from living in the state of joyous astonishment which kept youth so happy. Could this really be he, Nikolai Alexandrovich Sharov, who had formerly roamed the steppe untiringly with students trailing after him? They had even stopped asking him to come with them now. And the students themselves were different, somehow. Why was Arkadi Korenev his favourite pupil, and

not that Orekhov? Could it be his fault that Korenev was so unlike Orekhov? Korenev, too, was painstaking, but he always agreed with his teacher, never questioned anything, and it was hard to get him out of the laboratory.

"Why didn't you ask Korenev to come?" said Sharov with sudden reproach. "I'm an old fellow, and yet I'm not afraid of the damp."

Nikita smiled vaguely, but the next moment his face resumed its former expression.

"Look," he whispered. There was a vole sitting on its haunches on the ground exactly opposite Sharov. He instantly made a mental note of its species, and even of its approximate age. There it sat opposite him, greedily gnawing off an ear of wheat which it held in its front paws.

"Gobbling up wheat, the little beast," said Nikita furiously. "Wheat!"

And true enough, the vole was not just eating, it was fairly gobbling. Its sharp yellowish front teeth moved rapidly, its lips twitched ravenously. It had fat, fleshy cheeks and small, callous eyes. Snatching the ear, it disappeared with it into its hole. Sharov looked round—yes, it was evidently a big colony. All round, quite near him, were innumerable holes, all crammed with voles and spoilt wheat.

Sharov was suddenly infected with the hatred that filled Nikita's breast. He could well understand this youth, who had grown up on the land and loved the land, who knew the toil put into it, and could not tolerate the existence of field mice.

But the delightful sensation of returning youth which Sharov had experienced in the field, left him on the way home. Why? And why did he feel guilty before Orekhov? Why had he up to now found no means of fighting field rodents? He could not answer these questions.

Although the colony was not on the land of The Streams but in a field belonging to a small neighbouring kolkhoz, Nikita and Alexei Vyushkov went there and scattered poisoned grain in the holes. But it soon became clear that by no means all the voles perished. Nikita observed that some recovered from the poisoning. And another thing he noticed was that the birds eagerly pecked up the poisoned grain lying on the earth in front of the holes. The students were always finding dead birds, and every *post mortem* dissection showed poisoning. Those which perished were necessary, useful birds. They would be missed. Nikita went to Sharov, glanced at him in silent reproach, and laid before him the cold bodies of birds whose fledglings were now condemned to death by starvation.

Every time he met Alexei Vyushkov, Nikita had a fresh access of rage. Notwithstanding their best efforts, the wheat of The Streams showed obvious traces of the visits of the mice from the neighbouring kolkhoz.

Nikita and Alexei persuaded Zakhar Petrovich to come to an agreement with the chairman of this kolkhoz, and get him to have the infected field ploughed up. But even this did little to pacify Alexei. So long as the wheat was not harvested and the ground not ploughed under, the mice flourished, gorging themselves and multiplying. Alexei pictured to himself with fatal distinctness how they would spread over to the splendid fields and truck gardens of The Streams. It was just at this time that Lopatin called Nikita to him one evening and showed him a letter. It was from a former pupil of Lopatin, now a scientist of some standing. The writer described a new means of fighting voles and water-rats which he had been employing for two years. He dug a fairly deep ditch round a field and sprinkled poisoned bait and powder in it. In the first place, the short-pawed vermin found difficulty in crossing the ditch. In the second, even if they

did not eat the poisoned bait, the powder clung to their paws, so that they were poisoned when washing themselves. The letter ended with the modest statement that results were satisfactory and the farmers were pleased.

Nikita listened with bated breath. It was a letter from one who was already doing what Nikita was still only dreaming about.

Late as it was, Nikita rushed to Alexei, woke him up and read the letter to him. When he finished, Alexei got up and dressed, and together they went to Zakhar Petrovich. On the way it began to rain, and they arrived at the chairman's house wet and excited.

"We'll try it," said the chairman when, both talking at once, they had told him all about it.

"We'll call a Komsomol meeting to-morrow," declared Alexei. "We'll mobilize all the young people."

"And I'll bring our students," put in Nikita.

"The neighbours must help, too," said Alexei.

The windows were lit up. A powerful crash of thunder broke overhead.

"Perhaps the weather will help us," said the chairman thoughtfully. Alexei and Nikita looked inquiringly at him.

"Rain and plenty of it," explained Zakhar Petrovich laconically. He seemed to be thinking. "We've almost got in the hay. It won't do the grain crops any harm. Even if it lasts five days, they'll stand it."

Alexei and Nikita stayed up very late that night, planning, calculating the length of the ditch to be dug, the time it would take, the number of people needed. The sound of rain drumming on the roof formed a background for their whispered calculations.

The next morning Nikita was driven back to the biological station by one of the kolkhoz's best horses. And a day later the chairman's prophecy was confirmed. The

rains had begun. Powerful, incessant torrents flooded all the holes of the field mice. Alexei and Nikita sighed their relief, even while they regretted that the necessity for carrying out a united attack had been removed. Now Nikita only had to gather up great batches of drowned voles and carry them to the laboratory, where he ripped them open, investigated them and took their measurements more methodically than ever Korenev could have.

Sharov watched Nikita with ever-increasing satisfaction. He grew more and more attached to him and constantly caught himself in the admission that Korenev was getting on his nerves.

The rain kept up for several days, but in no way interfered with the life of the biological station.

The plan of Lopatin and the chairman was fulfilled.

The director was removed from his post; and the downpour seemed to have washed away the last traces of him. Kuzmich was expected to return to the biological station any day now. All this, it is true, was not brought about till Lopatin and Chebrets had had yet another conflict with the dean. But after the matter had been thrashed out in the Party Committee, Khrust was forced to give in.

For four days the sounds of axes wielded by a brigade of kolkhoz carpenters, aided by students, resounded throughout the biological station. All the birds got used to the noise, and even Lopatin's favourite, the stumpy-tailed redstart, ceased to pay attention to the blows and the general hubbub.

The ground was covered with shavings, which Boris carried off to the kitchen. A new cook was now established there—Auntie Nastya, whom Zakhar Petrovich, after a great deal of persuasion, ceded to them for the summer.

Various workmen from the kolkhoz completely transformed the boys' living quarters. Electricity was put in. Windows were widened. A neat little bath-house was erected, smelling of damp timber and lime-blossom.

Behind the stove, on the other side of the partition, a drying-room for boots was cleverly contrived.

Work was in full swing. Boris Arkadyevich, the entomologist, had collected innumerable insects from the meadow and placed them in glass jars. They thrived in captivity, increased and multiplied. The ticks extracted from foxes' holes by Varya were very popular. Two of the girls actually quarrelled over the study of their development, but Boris Arkadyevich managed to distract one of them with the offer of a daddy-long-legs.

The frugal botanists busied themselves with a herbarium begun two summers before.

As for the zoologists, Lopatin and Vera Vasilievna behaved as if there were no such thing as rain. They disappeared in the woods at dawn, taking with them the hardiest students.

"Come on, my valiant frogs," Lopatin would cry, and the "frogs" would stamp along bravely in rubber boots and rustling mackintoshes.

Gromada had brought a dozen pairs of rubber boots and as many mackintoshes from town. He was only away for two days, but displayed enormous activity, returning with a lorry full of invaluable articles. He brought tanks for boiled water, saucepans, plates, dazzling sky-blue oilcloth, new basins for the bath-house and a medicine-chest with so many different medicaments that each student would have had to be ill at least twice to use them up.

But for the danger that the rains would go on till crops were spoilt, Lopatin would have been quite glad of them. They afforded the students an opportunity to study the life of the inhabitants of the forest not only when it was sunny, warm and dry, but during bad weather, with its attendant difficulties. When it rained the importance of the sites selected by the birds for their nests, of the manner in which they were built, of every little detail

that went in to their construction, became more apparent than ever.

Study hikes in the rain were so delightful that even students who had already passed their zoology exams took part in them. Yura Dozhdikov was the only one who never left the house. Yura had unexpectedly become the head of a large family.

This is how it had come about:

Varya had found a lark's nest in the field, with four dead fledglings in it. She was greatly upset and brought them back to the biological station. Now there was nothing for it but to cut the dead birds open, examine them, measure their dimensions, and weigh them. But just as Varya was approaching the gate of the biological station she felt a feeble palpitation in her hand. It seemed incredible that the cold, helpless little bundles could have come to life. Varya could not believe it even when she felt that they were getting warm; she was sure it must be the mere transmittance of the heat of her hand. But a closer glance at one of the fledglings convinced her that the little heart was slowly, uncertainly beginning to throb.

Varya ran into the girls' cottage.

"Vera Vasilievna, one of them seems to be alive."

At that very moment Yura appeared in the doorway. He had a dead lark in his hand, and looked extremely sad.

"Where did you find it?" asked Varya. "Perhaps it's their mother."

"I'm sure it is," said Yura. "You can see that at once."

Vera Vasilievna laughed. It was quite impossible to be sure of such a thing.

But of late Yura had begun to consider himself an expert on birds. The day after the memorable encounter on the bank of the river, he had sought an opportunity to catch Lopatin at home alone, and asked him for his notes on owls.

Lopatin had made him sit down on the side of the bed, given him a glass of tea, and scolded him for an hour and a half for his verses, which he considered bad (how he knew them, Yura could not imagine), and for his amorousness and frivolity, which he called unmanly. He had finished up by handing him a bulging file with the word *Owls* on the cover. Yura sat up till four in the morning reading the closely written pages. Then he set off for the woods and found three owls' nests. One of them was in the hollow of a huge tree which was half burnt down. Two grey owlets, exactly alike, no doubt extremely soft and warm to the touch, crept to the edge of the hollow in the half-light. They sat there motionless, gazing blankly at Yura with round, unblinking eyes. Yura's heart was softened by the sight, and he sat two hours in front of the tree. It was the second time in his life that Yura had really concentrated his attention on a serious problem and by the end of the summer he felt he had acquired a thorough knowledge of the habits of owls. Lopatin gave him a good mark, but warned him that it was not for his knowledge, which was still extremely superficial, but because he had displayed strength of will for the first time in his life.

And now, glancing at the lark, Yura began:
"We ornithologists consider—"

But just then one of the fledglings writhing on its belly in the palm of Yura's hand, thrust up its head, and a greedy, wide-open beak quivered above something like a tuft of moss. The fledgling could hardly hold its head up, but it demanded insistently to be fed.

"It's hungry," said Yura in an excited whisper.

Vera Vasilievna was watching him attentively. ("My dear Vera Vasilievna," Professor Lopatin had always told her, "there's some bait that will catch the most resistant student. It's up to us to discover what it is.")

"Go get some ant-eggs this minute," ordered Vera

Vasilievna. "Grasshoppers, too. Ant-eggs alone won't be enough. They'll get rickets."

Almost before the words were out of her mouth, Yura had disappeared.

The fledglings were put in a round cardboard biscuit-box, which was placed above a pan of hot water. Varya had wanted to line the bottom of the box with cotton wool, but Vera Vasilievna would not let her. The fibres of the cotton would catch in the birds' claws and beaks. Soft hay and breast-feathers were used instead.

In a quarter of an hour Yura was back, holding a plate he had filched from the kitchen. The plate was filled with last year's pine-needles and dry twigs, beneath which there swarmed a mass of infuriated reddish ants. Here and there in the swarming mass gleamed white ant-eggs.

Just then Boris appeared.

"Go and fetch some more ant-eggs," said Vera Vasilievna.

They began feeding the fledglings, depositing a few eggs at a time in their open beaks by means of tiny pincers. By the time the fourth fledgling had been fed, the first, shifting lazily on its little round belly, was again raising its head and opening its beak.

"The great thing is not to over-feed them," said Vera Vasilievna. "They must be fed every quarter of an hour. We'll begin with ten eggs at a time."

An hour later Boris came back, bearing a carefully rolled cone of newspaper. Without a word he took Yura's plateful of rubbish and emptied it out of the window. Then he opened his cone and, first wiping the plate clean, shook on to it a heap of irreproachably clean, big, yellowish ant-eggs. Boris did all this very slowly, enjoying a sense of superiority.

"Grade-A eggs," he said, and extended the plate towards Yura. "Here you are, Comrade Dozhdikov. Now I'll go for some grasshoppers."



"What a pity—" sighed Vera Vasilievna as she watched the frowning Yura carefully deposit ant-eggs in the fledglings' beaks—"what a pity they'll have to be chloroformed in the end."

"Then why bother reviving them?" asked Yura angrily. "We warmed them and fussed over them, and petted them, and fed them, and now you say they must be chloroformed. What for?"

"Who will look after them?" asked Vera Vasilievna. "It's a hard job. You worry yourself sick over them for two or three days, and in the end they die just the same."

She might have appealed to his vanity by saying that an extremely experienced and accurate person would, of course, be able to save the fledglings. But it seemed to her that Yura did not possess much vanity.

"Vera Vasilievna," he implored, holding the box of fledglings to his breast. "Vera Vasilievna...."

If he had made an eloquent appeal, Vera Vasilievna would probably not have believed him. It was precisely his inarticulateness and imploring eyes which convinced her. She realized she was enjoying a great pedagogical victory.

"I'll feed them," began Yura. "On my word as a Komsomol member, I will. And I'll pass my exam in entomology. Just see what a coincidence! I have to collect insects for entomology anyhow. There'll be any amount of food. I—"

He was about to make a most persuasive speech, but before he had a chance to utter it the ravenous fledglings all raised their heads together, and Yura rushed to feed them.

And so Dozhdikov became a *paterfamilias*. He got very little sleep now. Every now and then he flung himself on to his cot, only to leap up after a few minutes to make sure the fledglings were still alive.

"The sleep of a nursing-mother," the students teased

him. They would gladly have helped Yura, but he defended his paternal rights jealously. The only person he trusted was Boris. The others he only allowed to bring insects which they caught by "dragging" the grass with butterfly-nets.

As the fledglings grew, their appetites developed alarmingly. Fortunately they were gradually trained to eat all sorts of insects. They woke up at three every morning as birds are wont to do, and insisted on being fed. But they gave up some of their bird customs. For instance, they did not go to bed at six, or at the latest, eight, as they would have at home, but demanded nourishment up till eleven at night. The silly little things took electric light for the sun and refused to sleep. When at last Yura had the idea of covering them to keep the light out, it was too late. The birds had grown accustomed to having a late supper and cheerfully tossed off the sheet of dark paper laid over them.

But it was not a mere matter of feeding the fledglings. Vera Vasilievna entrusted a series of investigations to Yura. He had to draw the birds at least once in three days, to note the dates of important events in their lives, such as when their eyes opened and when they began to stand upright. And he had to record the order in which their plumage grew, the development of down on their heads and backs, etc.

The down grew so long that when the fledglings lay huddled together in their box they looked like one big, fluffy hedgehog. The down came over their beaks, making them look curved. And at last, like some amazing vegetable growth, appeared the plumage. The feathers appeared first like hard pipes, at the ends of which the down fluttered and fell off, and then the feathers, breaking through their covering, spread all over the rosy skin.

In addition to all this, Yura was kept busy weighing the food taken by the fledglings and the capsules excreted.

A capsule came wriggling out of a fledgling almost as soon as it swallowed its portion of insects, for there is very little room in a bird's stomach.

Every student considered it a duty to ask after Yura's fledglings. What were their temperatures, how much weight had they put on, were their digestions in order, their spirits good?

Yura's replies were brief and exact. Without raising his head, he would continue filling in a chart, or following attentively the vacillations of the pointer on scales weighing a plump, cheerful baby lark.

When a small crowd gathered round him, Nikita would drive everyone away. "Get out of the way—can't you see he's working?"

And the rain went on and on. Overhead were wet branches, underfoot wet grass, through the windows the monotonous drumming of the rain, and a grey mist. But this mist and wet was shot through with youthful laughter and earnest talk that overcame the effects of the rain like sun itself.

CHAPTER 17

The father of the redstart family was portly, middle-aged, and very amicable. He trusted people, for he had lived on the grounds of the biological station for many years and knew that its inhabitants never harmed the birds—only watched them and listened to their songs. For that reason he did not fly away when he saw Marina. On the contrary, he cocked his head and fixed her with one bright eye.

Marina stopped and whistled to him cheerfully. He whistled in reply. He puffed himself up, as befitted a redstart with such a handsome red tail. This particular redstart was apparently unaware of the fact that he had long since lost his tail. How this happened is not re-

corded, but it was just this lack of tail that enabled everybody to identify him.

Marina and the redstart went on conversing for some time. Suddenly Marina realized that she too had drawn up one foot and cocked her head on one side. But she restrained her laughter to avoid frightening her friend; she merely said: "Good-bye, Bobtail," and continued leisurely on her way to the station.

Marina was returning from the bird-house, where the sparrows had made their nest, and where Fyodor Fyodorovich and Nikita had installed the blackcap.

Things were going splendidly. The sparrows had taken kindly to the fledgling and fed it until it was almost ready to fly. Marina was delighted that Nikita should have entrusted her with his ward.

"The Growth and Development of Fledglings Removed from their Parent Nest" was the topic Fyodor Fyodorovich had assigned to Marina for her term paper.

Marina had made up her mind much earlier than she, like Timiryazev, would specialize in plant physiology. She was only 15 years old when she had first read Timiryazev—read his books without stopping, from cover to cover, as other girls devour love-stories. It was as if she were talking to this man; she saw his piercing eyes, his quizzical smile, his high, intellectual forehead. When she entered the university she knew much more than was required of a first-year student. But her early choice of a speciality did not prevent her from taking an interest in other subjects. Doggedly she studied chemistry, physics and zoology.

She decided to illustrate her paper on the fledglings with photographs and graphs showing their weight-increase and feather-development. Each of the curves on the graphs would be drawn with a different coloured pencil. She enjoyed contemplating how she would do it. Indeed, she enjoyed everything she undertook.

Marina glanced at her watch. She still had plenty of time. She lay down on the grass, propped herself on one elbow and gave a little sigh. Enough of thinking about pleasant things; there were unpleasant things to be thought of too.

Of late Marina's calm and unruffled life had been disturbed: boys had begun falling in love with her. It was a natural calamity. Worst of all was the fact that her father considered it all her fault. As soon as she got back from the biological station, for instance, he would be sure to fix her with his eye and say:

"Well, Marina Yevgeniyevna, I hear you've ruined the life of another decent chap!"

And as usual she would try to defend herself:

"It's not my fault, Dad, truly it isn't. It was his own fault."

"Do you expect me to believe that?" her father would say. "Before the poor boy ever reached the stage of declaring his love, you had ruined him with your glances. Have you no control over them?"

It was horrid to have to listen to such things. And so Marina went about doing her best not to look at anybody and not to smile. Yet in the morning when she ran to classes down the snowy road, she did allow herself to smile. Everything looked so gay! But the minute she entered the university she knitted her brows and pulled a long face for fear someone else might take it into his head to fall in love with her. . . .

Here came Gromada sauntering down the road. Marina was surprised to see him. Only the other day he had been called to town for a meeting of the Party Bureau, and she had not expected him to return so soon.

He had a butterfly-net slung over his shoulder; at present his group was studying entomology. He came rolling along, swinging his specimen-jar with a care-free air.

"Good day," Marina said drily.

"Good day," replied Gromada, just as drily.

He nodded and went on. Marina followed him with her eye, remarking to herself that there was something very interesting and original about him. And he didn't pay the slightest attention to her. Just went along swinging his jar and waving his pole. And a good thing too. You could rely on a man like Gromada not to fall in love with you, Marina Yevgenyevna. You could smile at him as much as you liked.

Gromada turned into the woods—evidently on the trail of a tempting insect. "Let him!" thought Marina, crest-fallen. It was hard to have to go through life with a scowl on your face. One would like to smile too, once in a while.

Gromada proceeded in a brisk, business-like manner for a little distance, but as soon as he felt that Marina could no longer see him, he sat down on a stump and began to fill his pipe.

Stupid of him not to have spoken to Marina. Walked right past her, idiot that he was, as if the chance to be alone with her presented itself every day. She had spoken to him first. And he had run away in this disgraceful manner. Should he return? Hardly. She had just said hello to him to be polite. That was only natural—they hadn't seen each other for two whole days. Gromada's expression grew more sombre as he thought of those two days.

As for Marina, there was plenty of evidence to show that she never so much as noticed him. Always looked at him as if he were part of the landscape—a tree or a bush. He rose reluctantly from the stump and set out for the house in which Fyodor Fyodorovich lived.

Never before had Gromada been reluctant to visit Lopatin.

The door was standing ajar, and he looked through the crack.

Someone was asleep on the bed—Chebrets, as Gromada saw to his surprise. Why hadn't he told him he intended coming to the biological station? He was sleeping with his hand under an unshaven cheek.

Fyodor Fyodorovich was sitting at the table writing. The door squeaked.

"Victor?" whispered Fyodor Fyodorovich without turning round. "Come in, Victor." Gromada lingered on the threshold. "So you've turned up at last."

"Expecting that Victor of yours?" asked Gromada sharply, making no effort to suppress his feelings.

When Chebrets opened his eyes, his face, so severe and preoccupied even in sleep, was instantly lit up; his high forehead indicated intelligence and doggedness, and the lines of his mouth were at once sensitive and restrained.

Gromada darted a quick look at him, but Chebrets failed to catch its meaning.

"Yes, I'm expecting him," said Fyodor Fyodorovich. "I've been expecting him since yesterday. He must have returned. He'll be here any time now."

"And supposing he doesn't come?"

"He'll be here," said Fyodor Fyodorovich with conviction, adding in conciliatory tones: "Why are you so grumpy, Ivan Ostapovich? He doesn't like Belevsky, Ilya, think of that. He's jealous of him, on my word."

"Not any more."

Fyodor Fyodorovich gave him a searching look. It seemed to him that there was underlying significance in the words.

"I'm glad of that. And where does he spend his time? Courting, eh?" He turned inquiringly to Chebrets. "Do you think he's in love, Ilya? It's become quite catastrophic.... It's the same every time we get out into the woods."

Sighs and loss of appetite. Could it be that Victor has succumbed at last? He was such a staunch one...."

Fyodor Fyodorovich seemed anxious to have his supposition confirmed.

"A good thing, too," said Chebrets sleepily. "It's high time. He's a bit too dry, that paragon of perfection, if you ask me."

Fyodor Fyodorovich looked at him in surprise, but Chebrets had fallen asleep once more. Lopatin went over and covered him with a blanket.

"Worn out. All in. Arrived as cross as two sticks. Said he'd come to talk. And fell asleep. But you're in a bad humour too, I see."

"Fyodor Fyodorovich," said Gromada softly.

"Has anything happened, Ivan Ostapovich?"

"Nothing in particular," said Gromada, moving closer to Lopatin. The little hut was crowded and Fyodor Fyodorovich was obliged to sit down. "But you mustn't expect Belevsky to come back. You mustn't, Fyodor Fyodorovich. At this minute he's sitting in Shumsky's laboratory with the Drosophila. That's what has happened. Abandoned his team. Gone to Moscow. Made his apologies. Repented. And made arrangements to work there. He has gone over to genetics. You yourself saw him dancing attendance on Shumsky after the meeting."

"I don't believe it! It must be a mistake! You have no right to say such a thing!" Lopatin gave an angry wave of his hand. "He went up to Shumsky after the meeting just to give him a piece of his mind. That's all. Nothing else. But you, dear friend, did *not* go up to him."

Gromada's sunburnt face darkened with resentment.

"I did not." He made a great effort to keep himself in hand. "I didn't go up to him. I led the discussion at the meeting into proper channels. Because I am loyal to you, Professor Lopatin. I have nothing to say to Shumsky.

One doesn't argue with the enemy. I never argue with Shumsky, and you know it. You are the one who argues. I only fight Shumsky. And I intend to fight him to the end."

Fyodor Fyodorovich got up, pushed his way with difficulty between the table and the bed, and went out on the veranda. It was getting dark, and his large figure with the mournfully drooping shoulders was silhouetted in the doorway. Chebrets woke up again. He and Gromada exchanged glances and they both made for the door.

"I'm all right," said Fyodor Fyodorovich without turning round.

He stood there for a few moments. Then he took his pipe and a box of matches out of his pocket. The first match went out. So did the second one.

"It's the wind. Blows them out," said Fyodor Fyodorovich.

"Yes, it's the wind," agreed Chebrets gravely, staring unblinkingly at the motionless dark leaves.

Lopatin turned to Gromada.

"You might show Comrade Chebrets our biological station. He'll find it interesting. I'll sit here a little while longer. There's some work I want to do."

"No, Fyodor Fyodorovich," objected Chebrets. "That's not very polite. It's you I've come to see."

"Very well, stay where you are," consented Lopatin. "And you stay, too," nodding to Gromada. "We'll have tea."

The practical Gromada put on the kettle. Fyodor Fyodorovich remained on the veranda. Chebrets was standing beside him. Fearing to break the silence, Gromada sat down cautiously on the bed which gave a plaintive squeak.

"No reason to sit in there. Come out here. Sit with us," said Fyodor Fyodorovich.

Gromada obediently came out.

"How do you explain it?" said Fyodor Fyodorovich. "You, Ilya? Or you, Ivan Ostapovich? I can't understand a thing."

"How could you be expected to?" observed Gromada as if he were the elder man of the two.

"Has my teaching been such a failure?" continued Fyodor Fyodorovich. "Didn't he understand anything? If he disagreed with me, why didn't he argue it out? That's so important. I remember once arguing with no less a person than Williams. And a very interesting argument it was. Victor must have changed his point of view very recently. Why, it was only a few days ago that he wanted to take part in the discussion following that lecture on genetics."

"What makes you think he wanted to?" asked Gromada.

"He told me so himself. He had some very curious facts to disclose. But, as you remember, Shumsky wouldn't let you give him the floor."

"Shumsky? Wouldn't let *me*?" Gromada got up. "I'm afraid you don't know me, Professor Lopatin. That Victor of yours never made a move to speak. I expected him to, although to tell you the truth I never thought much of him. But he had no intention of speaking at that meeting. He wouldn't risk losing his student's stipend. And above all, he wouldn't antagonize the powers that be."

"You're wrong, Ivan Ostapovich. Belevsky's a man of principle."

Chebrets gave an uncertain sort of cough.

"If he has become a follower of Shumsky, I have undoubtedly failed in my teaching. And it is my fault if he has chosen the wrong path in science."

"What has science to do with it?" interrupted Chebrets, no longer able to restrain himself. "My dear Professor, what has science to do with it? And what are you

looking at me like that for?" he burst out, evidently unable to endure Lopatin's bewildered gaze. "It's no use looking like that. Your Victor doesn't give a damn who's right—you or Shumsky. The only thing he cares about is to entrench himself in the world of science as soon as possible. It makes not the slightest difference to him whether he gets there riding on your thrush or on Shumsky's flies. Not the slightest. All he thinks of is getting there as quickly as possible, and having a car placed at his disposal."

For some time the only thing to be heard was the sound of the tea-kettle boiling on the electric stove and the rattling of the lid as the steam escaped. But nobody went to take the kettle off.

"I suppose I've grown fond of the lad," Fyodor Fyodorovich said, looking into the eyes of Gromada, who silently nodded his head. "It's hard to give him up."

"That's a pity," muttered Chebrets. "A great pity."

"Not a pity—it's inexcusable! How can I expect to be trusted with young people from now on? To have favoured a scoundrel like him at such a crucial moment! A blind old fool, that's what I am!"

"He was so capable, so industrious!" said Chebrets scathingly.

Gromada gave him a look of reproach, but Chebrets was determined to give vent to his feelings. He ignored the look.

"Industrious!" mocked Fyodor Fyodorovich. "I've seen such industrious students before! Ivan Ostapovich warned me. What could I have been thinking of? I used to have a keen nose for careerists, remember, Ilya? An excellent nose. What are you laughing at?"

"It's funny to sit here and listen to a man speak of himself in the past tense. Do you think all the careerists have been rooted out?"

"Even snipers miss sometimes," said Gromada soothingly.

But he did not mean it. At the front he had expressed himself very differently on this point.

"There should be no misses," fumed Fyodor Fyodorovich. "Not in battle. The enemy——"

"Do you call *him* the enemy?" said Chebrets disparagingly. "He's not the one we must talk about to-night."

Suddenly he burst out laughing.

"To think of having slipped up on such a young and, so to speak, green careerist!" he laughed. "Very remiss of you, Professor Lopatin, very remiss indeed."

"I know it was."

"Haven't we had about enough of this?" said Gromada, who was suffering intensely for Fyodor Fyodorovich.

"No, we haven't," said the incorrigible Chebrets. "That Victor of yours is just a beginning. Wait and see what lies at the root of the trouble, Professor Lopatin. Your goodness, your trustfulness, your soft-heartedness! You're so fond of everyone, so anxious about everyone. Victor, and Sharov, and everyone else. But aren't you anxious about your university? About the future of science?"

Lopatin got up.

"You're too young to talk to me like that, Ilya. Too young—understand?"

"No, I'm not. I'll prove I'm right. Let's suppose that your Shumsky comes a cropper and Victor comes running back to you. You'd trust him again, you know."

"Oh no, I wouldn't."

"Yes, you would. You're so soft-hearted."

Lopatin jumped up.

"Me soft-hearted?" he roared. "Me? Why, I was fighting the enemy before you were born! Soft-hearted, indeed! If a youngster like you thinks he can——"

Chebrets felt a pleasant conviction that in another minute the old man would strike him.

"He's in a fury!" he interrupted with mock terror. "A perfect fury. Calm him down, Ivan Ostapovich! A fury, I tell you. Did you ever see the like?"

Lopatin took a deep breath, and Chebrets went on, now very earnestly: "But you really are too easy-going, Fyodor Fyodorovich. Not that you're the only one. So am I. So is Gromada. One's as bad as the other. Why don't you ask us about the last meeting of the Party Bureau, Fyodor Fyodorovich? It put me in such a state I had to come to you to work off my feelings. Every question led to a clash. It made me furious, and furious with you, first of all."

"With me? Why?"

"For one thing, I'll never forgive you for not being a member of the Bureau."

"But that's not my fault."

"Not your fault?" cried the infuriated Chebrets. "Did you hear that, Ivan? Not his fault! He goes off to a hunters' conference in Siberia. A very important conference, I have no doubt. For hunters. And for Siberia. And for foxes. Off he goes at the vital moment. And so Professor Lopatin is not present at the re-election of members to the Party Bureau. He's taking a rest, basking in the sun in Siberia and admiring the foxes."

"But I couldn't have postponed the conference, could I?"

"You had no right to miss the re-election. None whatever. You could have gone to Siberia later. They could not elect Lopatin, because he was absent. We lost Petrov, another honest man in the Bureau, because he had gone over to the Lenin Academy. So Shumsky and his friends were elected, one after another. You abandoned your post, Professor Lopatin. What right had you to abandon your post? It's because of you that Gromada and I are having

such a hard time of it now. Am I the Secretary? Only in name. I can't put through a single thing I should like to. Shumsky and Khrust, Khrust and Shumsky. What are we to do? And then there's Sharov——"

"Sharov?"

"Yes, Sharov. He's the trump they're always playing against me. He's fat and famous and a real authority. No one can deny that. The minute there's a disagreement, Shumsky reminds everyone in a mild voice that I'm not a biologist, and quotes the famous scientists who are his friends—Sharov first of all. Listen, Comrade Lopatin, I've had enough. I won't let any young upstart set your hands to trembling...."

"You don't have to rub that in, you know."

"It isn't just that boy," interposed Gromada. "It's the combination of everything. Belevsky, and Sharov, and Shumsky...."

"As I was saying, Comrade Lopatin," said Chebrets, ignoring Gromada, "if Shumsky uses Sharov as a prop once more, you and I are going to have words of quite another sort."

"You needn't worry about Sharov," said Lopatin. "I'll answer for him. As for you, Ivan Ostapovich, you had no business leaving Sharov. None at all. If you felt that something was wrong in his laboratory, you should have put it right, not run away."

"I have no weight with him," said Gromada drily. "As a matter of fact, I haven't even seen him of late. Perhaps he is to be reached here, but not in town. Shumsky keeps him well tabbed."

Gromada spoke with feeling, anxious to explain to Lopatin what had been worrying him for so long. But Chebrets interrupted him.

"Sharov's not the only trouble. To tell the truth, Fyodor Fyodorovich, I have only just come to realize how far matters have gone. Things are very bad in our fac-

ulty. Very." Chebrets took a turn on the veranda and then said: "Give me a glass of tea, Ivan. The kettle boiled long ago."

Gromada entered the house and said guiltily:

"It's come unsoldered, Fyodor Fyodorovich. There wasn't much water in it, it seems."

"You'll find a saucepan there—a green one. Use that," said Fyodor Fyodorovich absent-mindedly as he took Chebrets' arm. "Did you apply to the Party Committee?"

"I did."

"Well?"

"They were surprised. Greatly surprised. Said that in many things they weren't in a position to judge. The biologists must do that, and then report to them. But the biologists keep mum. I ventured to say a word or two to the effect that I'm not a biologist either. They were more polite than they should have been, in my opinion. But they remarked with perfect justice that I had no business running to them with trifles. They had helped and supported me on more than one occasion, and it was high time to stop thinking about isolated facts and individuals and get to the root of the matter, so that proper measures might be taken. In a word, they politely gave me to understand that I had not justified the confidence placed in me."

"You're not the only one responsible," interrupted Gromada. "There are other members of the Party Bureau and the Party organization."

"But I'm the Secretary. Which means I'm the one who answers for things. I'm the head."

"Look how puffed up he's become! Won't share his laurels with anybody!" snorted Gromada. "He's the only one. He's the head. We don't count."

"You haven't been a member of the Party Bureau long, Gromada. You're just a student, though there's no denying you've done a lot for us."

"Perhaps you'd like to offer me smelling-salts?" said Gromada in injured tones. "I'm so young. I'm so excitable. Why, I take things a great deal more calmly than you do!"

"But *you* are the biologist," went on Chebrets, turning to Lopatin, "and as such you ought to have come to my aid. But you were too busy playing the 'cello with Sharov."

"What is the next step to be taken?" asked Lopatin, waiving the question of Sharov, convinced that both Chebrets and Gromada were mistaken about him.

"They told me to collect facts," said Chebrets. "And that's what I'm doing. I read through the minutes of our meetings. Terrific! The way they lied to us. Threw dust in our eyes. What were we thinking of? My ears burned with shame as I sat there reading them that night, all alone in the Party Bureau office."

"Have you ever had a Party reprimand?" asked Fyodor Fyodorovich.

"Never."

"Neither have I. Now, how could we, honest Communists, have allowed such a thing to happen?"

"I've been thinking about that," said Chebrets. "Wait a second.... I'll explain.... That saucepan's making such a racket—can't stand it!" He ran into the house, switched off the electric stove, and returned to the veranda. "Here's the point, my dear Fyodor Fyodorovich and Ivan Ostapovich. We've grown rich in the past thirty years. Rich in fine people. I came to understand that during the war. So did Lopatin. And you too, Ivan. How many of your acquaintances disappointed you during the war, Professor Lopatin? Let's count."

"Two. Three, counting to-day. And you, Gromada?"

"There was one chap," said Gromada.

"That's the point," said Chebrets. "That's why we've become so trusting. We're spoiled. We expected Shumsky

to make great discoveries. We spent our time educating that Khrust, or Crust, or whatever you call him. And it wasn't education he needed, but a good beating. A careerist. A coward. A bad sort. And the way you went on about Belevsky, Professor Lopatin! And what is Belevsky? A worm. Here's what you must do, Ivan," he said, turning to Gromada. "Find out all you can about the students. You can't imagine what a stir they've been making ever since that lecture at the biological station, Fyodor Fyodorovich! Shumsky keeps shouting: 'Expel them! Stop their student stipend!' We've got to defend them."

"I'll get the information for you," promised Gromada.

"How much time do you need?"

"About five days."

"No 'abouts'. Five days," said Chebrets. "I won't give you another hour. From what I gathered at the Party Committee, they're expecting the Central Committee to ask for an account of what's going on."

"And what am I to do in the meantime?" asked Fyodor Fyodorovich.

"You'll work here, at the biological station."

Fyodor Fyodorovich gave an indignant shrug of his shoulders, but Chebrets ignored it.

"Go on working. I'll send for you when necessary."

"Can I depend on that?"

"On my honour. And I have one request to make of you: speak to Sharov. He keeps playing into their hands."

"I told you not to worry about Sharov."

"I must be going or I'll miss my train," announced Chebrets unexpectedly. "You people stick together here."

"Come along, Ivan, we'll see him off."

Everything was quiet on the grounds. There were no lights in the houses. A song was wafted up from the

river, and through the dark pattern of the trees came the glow of a distant camp-fire. The rosy light made the trunks of the pines look still blacker. The woods smelled of moist earth and grass and moss.

Chebrets stopped, broke off a twig from a fir-tree, and crushed the soft young needles in his fingers.

"Not a bad profession you people invented for yourselves," he muttered enviously as he sniffed at the pungent needles. "Sit in the woods all summer and listen to the birds sing, and call it work."

Gromada gave a quiet laugh.

"There's nothing to laugh at. This is the first time I've been to the woods in two years. And here you are, drinking in this air to your heart's content."

Chebrets was joking, but Fyodor Fyodorovich walked beside him without a word. When they came to a turning, he stopped and said briefly:

"You go on. I'm going home. I'm tired."

Chebrets and Gromada remained standing there among the moist foliage and listening. Fyodor Fyodorovich's steps were slow and heavy.

"You shouldn't have told him about Belevsky today," said Chebrets reproachfully. "There was plenty of time for that."

"He was expecting him to come back," replied Gromada glumly. "I couldn't have that. Think of that rotter coming back and the old man receiving him with open arms. I couldn't allow that, could I?"

"I suppose not."

"You're a fine one yourself!" flared up Gromada. "The way you went on—he was to blame for this, he was to blame for that—"

"Who have I to talk to?" Chebrets came to a halt. "Just tell me that—who have I to talk to? Khrust? Or the rest of that gang? I can't bear the sight of them. The

way they're always bowing and fawning to their chief. That's why I came here to you."

"And very right of you to have come," said Gromada, mollified.

They came out on the highway. It shone in the moonlight as if it had been watered. On either side rose the corn in high, solid walls. It exuded warmth. Corn, like water, preserves the heat accumulated during the day for a long time, giving it back slowly and grudgingly.

"Go back to the old man," said Chebrets. "He's taking it hard.

"He has a great heart, that man," said Gromada softly as Chebrets, quickening his steps to stave off sleep, walked off. And when he had said it, he felt that his words applied equally to Lopatin and to Chebrets.

"Good luck to you," he called out, and saw Chebrets wave his hand.

"He must be asleep," muttered Gromada to himself, seeing no light in the window. The hut was dark and quiet.

CHAPTER 18

After he left Gromada and Chebrets, Fyodor Fyodorovich decided to go home and sit down to work; that would ease his mind. But the nearer he got to the biological station, the clearer it became that he could not work that night. The buoyant mood that usually came over him when he worked at night failed him this time. He loved the quiet hours of the night at his desk. It was then that he made his most important discoveries—the discoveries of a scientist and thinker.

The research of Professor Lopatin followed a single general course: observation, giving rise to some definite problem; extensive scientific investigation; verification in practice; and, at last, the solution of the problem. And

the solution was invariably one that people had been long awaiting, one which answered some need in their lives. Scientists like Shumsky and his friends had become Lopatin's enemies because they feared his talent, his bold scientific approach, and his methods. No matter how deeply Lopatin delved into the field of science, he never lost contact with the earth—his own earth, on which his own people lived. He loved every blade of grass that grew upon it, every ray of sunlight that fell upon it. And the scientists who opposed him failed to realize that in pitting themselves against him they were pitting themselves against this earth, with its crops and flowers and fields and trees, and, most important of all, its people, who, together with him, lived on this earth, to whom Lopatin's approach to science was comprehensible, and who eagerly awaited his help. Professor Lopatin moved ahead with the masses and learned from them. And he trained young scientists to his way of thinking, so that in them was implanted some of the force he had acquired.

From time to time he was deceived. Not often, to be sure. He usually recognized his enemies, big or little. And having recognized them, he gave them no quarter.

In Belevsky he had not recognized an enemy. So weak and insignificant a foe as Belevsky was not worth the professor's powder and shot. He would be handled by those whom Lopatin had brought up. And still Lopatin was upset. Sick at heart, he decided to go and see Sharov. What if they did have their tiffs? Sharov was an old friend, and a true one when it came to fundamentals.

A motor car was standing in front of Sharov's house. Lopatin scowled at it. He wanted to speak to Sharov alone. Not only wanted to—it was essential that he do so that night.

And there, settled comfortably in a wicker arm-chair at the table, was Illarion Erastovich Shumsky! As though Lopatin hadn't had enough for one day. He was about to

turn and disappear, but it was too late. Shumsky had got up and was coming toward him, his hand graciously outstretched as if he, and not Sharov, were the master of the house.

"Glad to see you," he said in his velvety voice as he pressed Lopatin's hand with exaggerated warmth.

"Come in, Fyodor," said Sharov, who was delighted to see him.

Lopatin reluctantly went over to the table and sat down.

"I'm very glad to meet you at last in unofficial circumstances," said Shumsky, sitting down and half turning towards Lopatin. "Have some cognac; I brought it from town."

"Thanks. But I'd prefer a glass of tea."

Fyodor Fyodorovich put his glass under the tap of the samovar, but he no longer wanted tea. There was nothing he wanted—neither tea, nor cognac, nor Shumsky.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Sharov.

"No doubt the affair with Belevsky has upset you," said Shumsky negligently, pouring himself out some more cognac. "But after all, he's old enough to take care of himself. It's high time he chose his path and his teacher, isn't it?"

"Belevsky has something to do with it. Did you know that Belevsky had left me?" said Lopatin, turning to Sharov. "Gone over to Shumsky. Given up zoology. Become a geneticist and a supporter of the views of Professor Shumsky."

"So he left you after all!" exclaimed Sharov.

Fyodor Fyodorovich did not know that before leaving the biological station, Belevsky had been to see Sharov. His eyes had darted restlessly from side to side, his white forehead had been bedewed with sweat, and Sharov had felt he was in a state of extreme agitation.

"I should like you to include me among your pupils, Professor Sharov," he had said.

Sharov had gazed in astonishment into the frightened, roving eyes of Fyodor Fyodorovich's favourite pupil. He did not know that the last thing Belevsky wished at that moment was to be Fyodor Fyodorovich's favourite pupil. The heart of Professor Lopatin, it seems, was not a good taking-off point for the long-distance race Belevsky was determined to win. It appeared he had made a mistake. And so he had to leave Professor Lopatin. He wanted to be forgotten for a time. Sharov was a means of attaining this end.

Belevsky had been sure Sharov would be only too glad to have him as a pupil, considering how Fyodor Fyodorovich had praised him.

"Did Lopatin advise you to come to me?" asked Sharov at last.

"Well," said Belevsky with a little laugh intended to indicate the absurdity of the question, but a glance at Sharov's face showed him that the laugh was out of place. So he nodded in an ambiguous way that might have meant "yes", and might have meant "no".

"Lopatin places great hopes in you. If he had thought it advisable, he would have transferred you to me himself. I consider myself insulted by your request. You may go."

Once more Belevsky gave a little laugh, but this time it was barbed.

"To the best of my knowledge, you have chosen to remain neutral in this controversy, Professor, haven't you?"

"And is that why you wish to be my pupil?"

"Precisely."

"I'm an old man," Sharov had said. "I cannot be a soldier and a scientist at the same time. If I took sides in

this battle, I would have to make a thorough investigation of the arguments, and I have no time for that. I must finish the work I have begun. And I must hurry—very little time is left me."

"Lopatin is older than you," observed Belevsky.

"He's younger than *you*," returned Sharov. "I believe I have already asked you to leave my laboratory...."

As he now gazed into Fyodor Fyodorovich's tired face, Sharov was particularly incensed by the memory of that interview. He looked at Shumsky reproachfully.

"I never would have expected it of him," he said, thinking perhaps of Shumsky, perhaps of Belevsky.

Shumsky smiled, as if he had not noticed Sharov's look.

"Nor did I expect it," he said. "Especially after the last meeting when I had the satisfaction of noting how great Lopatin's influence was among students."

He took out a heavy cigarette-case and tapped a cigarette against the lid, on which was an enamel Drosophila fly.

"I'm not at all certain that I will keep him," he observed nonchalantly.

"Why not? He's sure to make good," said Lopatin with a shade of bitterness.

"I'm *not* so sure. He's already been poisoned by your teaching, my dear Fyodor Fyodorovich. He asks too many questions."

"If that's the case, things aren't so bad as I thought," said Lopatin. "At least he *asks*."

"Things are very bad. I'm not a museum guide. If he studies under me, he must believe everything, from beginning to end."

"Are you yourself sure about the beginning and the end?"

Sharov moved closer to Lopatin on the sofa.

"Fyodor Fyodorovich! You're always so brusque. Be a little more tactful, I implore you."

"That's all right, Nikolai Alexandrovich," said Shumsky in a placating tone. "We're just having a friendly talk. I've long been used to our colleague's brusqueness. If he wants to argue, I don't object. Why shouldn't we? Truth, they say, is born of argumentation."

"If that's the case, why don't you allow the people under you to open their mouths?"

"It isn't that I don't allow them," said Shumsky with a little laugh. "It's just that I assert my rights when I find people interfering with my work. Oh yes, Professor Lopatin, I know where my work begins, where it ends, and to what purpose it is directed. I know to what I am devoting my life and every ounce of my energy."

Lopatin winced.

"To the flies, Professor Shumsky. Every ounce of your energy goes to the flies. You must not think, however, that things can continue in this way. We are going to drive you out."

"Who do you mean by 'we'?" asked Shumsky.

"All of us Soviet scientists, as well as the people, the Party, and the Government. Do you think our kolkhoz workers don't know whether the work you are doing is needed or not? Do you think they don't know what you have turned our biology faculty into?"

"Still, it's just possible that our kolkhoz workers may permit me to go on with scientific work, isn't it?" asked Shumsky.

"No. They won't. Not with *your* scientific work—under no circumstances."

"Well, say you disapprove of the work being done in genetics," said Shumsky, his tone clearly indicating that he considered this talk scarcely worth the effort. "But your friend Sharov here—he's one of the greatest specialists on rodents. You agree that he is, don't you?"



"I do."

"But you disapprove of his work too. You say it has no practical application. But you are mistaken, Professor Lopatin. If rumours are correct, the work of Nikolai Alexandrovich is to be awarded a Stalin Prize this year."

Lopatin got up, walked across the room and stood looking straight at Sharov.

"Since you've brought up the subject, I may as well tell you—I know you won't take offence, Nikolai Alexandrovich. Your work will *not* receive a Stalin Prize this year, I for one, as a member of the Committee for Awarding Stalin Prizes, do not consider your work deserving such a high reward."

"You have a strange idea of friendship, Professor Lopatin." Shumsky got up, sat down on the sofa next to Sharov, and took his hand.

"It's you who have a strange idea of friendship, not I. My frankness means more to Sharov than your hand-clasp."

"You're wrong if you think I have no need of a friendly hand-clasp at this moment, Fyodor," said Sharov very softly. "I had no thought of getting such a high award—you know me well enough to believe that. But I should like to know the reasons for your opinion."

Lopatin no longer paid any attention to Shumsky. He spoke to Sharov as if they were alone in the room—just the two of them.

"Nikolai Alexandrovich," he said gently, moving towards his friend, "have you ever seen one of those gold bracelets in the form of a snake with its tail in its teeth and rubies or diamonds for eyes? Ever seen one?"

"Yes," replied Sharov wonderingly. "I've seen them."

"Well, your work is like one of those snakes. Endless time went into its making, to say nothing of gold, and precious stones, and talent. And such exquisite

workmanship! But what for? The snake just lies there with its tail in its teeth."

"A very apt simile," put in Shumsky. "One might even say artistic, but still I can't see why an exhaustive description of the systematics and morphology of rodents in the Soviet Union should be compared to a useless trinket."

"It is passive work," said Lopatin. "Done by a slave of Nature, and not its master. Will you never understand me? The most important thing that has happened to Soviet science is that it has ceased to be a science of study and observation alone and has become constructive and creative—a revolutionary science. Nature is not the master of our science; man and his science are the masters of Nature."

"You explained all that to the students," yawned Shumsky.

"And the students understood me. But you, Professor Shumsky, don't *want* to understand. That's why you are so afraid of our progressive-minded scientists."

"I assure you I'm not afraid."

"Yes you are. If you weren't, why should you set the students against them? You're afraid. Afraid of Timiryazev, Michurin and Pavlov. Of all of them. What they have done is death to you, Shumsky. Soon there will be nothing left of you. Just an empty suit of clothes."

"Fyodor! How can you say such a thing to a guest of mine!"

"Too bad he's your guest. I too was stupid enough to have trusted you once, Professor Shumsky. I am to be blamed for that. That I, an old man and a Communist, should have allowed such things to happen in our faculty! I had no right to trust you, nor to allow such things to happen, nor to hold my tongue...."

"This isn't a Party meeting, is it?" interrupted Shumsky.

Lopatin went over to him.

"Comrade Shumsky, when you are sitting in a friend's house drinking tea and cognac, do you automatically cease to be a member of the Party?"

Shumsky turned away with a weary shrug of his shoulders.

"Enough of showing me your profile!" said Lopatin. "Enough, I say! Look me in the eye and listen to what I have to say!"

Lopatin spoke in a low voice, almost in a whisper, the sort of whisper one uses when one wants to fight and shout. His face, in spite of his sunburn, was almost as white as his hair and beard.

"I was an old fool," he said. "But I have been doing a great deal of thinking and reading and discussing of late, and now everything is clear. I can see what is happening to you, and to all those who hold your ideas, and to people like Sharov whom you would like to entangle and drag into your camp."

"What camp, Fyodor?" asked Sharov. "Nobody is dragging me anywhere. You talk as if we were at war."

"We are. And that's precisely what you don't understand. And don't want to understand. I didn't understand it either. It was only during the war that little flags were stuck into the map to show us where the front was. But now, when we ourselves must draw the line showing the front in science, we have failed to make it plain where we stand and where the enemy stands. And we have entrusted the biology faculty of Moscow University—our pride and glory—to those who are unworthy of our trust."

"Think what you're saying, Fyodor!" cried Sharov. "Think what you're saying!"

"I am, Nikolai. And I'll try to explain to you what I'm saying. Listen, Shumsky, I once thought that you simply did the people no good; now I know that you do them

harm. I read all your articles, your works in various languages. And now I know that those flies of yours are not nearly as innocuous as they seem at first sight. The theme of your flies is an imported one; it was brought to us by aeroplane from abroad. I don't like the make of that aeroplane. It's not for us you work, but for foreign reactionaries in science. No wonder they keep on printing your works! You boast that Soviet genetics is leading the world. No wonder. Where else are there such opportunities as those open to Soviet geneticists? Who else has such laboratories as ours, such support, such financial independence? Where else in the world could a scientist of your age dream of a position such as you occupy? You've been given unlimited funds, workers, laboratories. And not just because Soviet people are generous. Because they trust you. They do not want, by some oversight, to prevent important work from being done. And what use have you made of their generosity? You have taken advantage of what you have been given to build up theories absolutely alien to our way of thinking. You teach that the germ plasm is deathless. That heredity cannot be influenced at will. And your colleagues working in the field of soil-science teach the law of the exhaustion of the soil. What does this lead to? The idea that new breeds cannot be developed. But people have created new breeds of hogs. And you say it's an impossibility. You argue against facts. You say the soil is slowly becoming impoverished. Crops are decreasing. What has mankind to look forward to? Starvation and slow extinction. What is Man, according to the followers of your scientific theories? A helpless creature living on deteriorating soil. The only thing he can do is sit and wait for capricious Nature to throw him a sport, a freak. He himself can do nothing. That's the way you sat and waited for your blue-eyed flies."

"Darwin held the same ideas," said Shumsky. "And I hardly consider myself capable of arguing with Darwin."

"There is certainly no need to attempt it. Darwin's work must be continued, but you are not up to the task. And don't attribute ideas to Darwin which he never expressed. Darwin made mistakes, but you are not capable of correcting them. You try to make Darwin out a supporter of Morgan. And not so long ago you cried that Darwinism had outlived its day. You call him a formalist and use him as a screen. You even try to show that he was the one who invented your genes. You would have us believe that scientists have not taken a single step forward since Darwin, that they have done nothing but elaborate his ideas. Darwin would not thank you for such views."

Shumsky waved his hand, as if about to protest, but Lopatin disregarded the gesture.

"Wait. Let me finish. Where did the investigations of your teachers, Mendel and Morgan, lead them? Where have they led you? Where are you leading others? To dependence on freak-flies, freak-trees, freak-fruit. Gradually the productive forces of Nature become exhausted and die out. And what's the conclusion? The same as that which your overseas colleagues reached. A conclusion which is as simple as it is terrible: too many people. The earth is overcrowded.

"So what's to be done about it? Is there a remedy? Oh, yes. It was found by people who have centuries of struggle for human culture and for power behind them, people who consider themselves highly civilized. And yet, Professor Shumsky, I do not think it was necessary to become a professor in order to find such a remedy. One might just as well have remained a Neanderthal man. What are the helpless men who have reached the peak of human culture to do? Why, fight, to be sure. Kill off half

the people so that the other half will have enough to eat. The fruits of your impoverished soil cannot feed more. On what principle is the selecting to be done? Modern science solves this problem, too. Here comes genetics to the aid. You know what it proposes better than I do. It's not for me to explain to you what eugenics is, what race prejudice is, and on what principle Hitler decided who was to die and who was to dominate the world. That's what your flies have brought you to. That's what you're working for—war, death and extermination. You are betraying all who have fought for the happiness of man, from Michelangelo, Pasteur and Pavlov, to those unnamed Russian doctors who died while inoculating themselves with the plague and cholera so as to learn how to conquer these diseases. Yes, *you*, no less than those microbiologists who spend their lives finding ways not to kill bacteria, but to spread them, to make them resistant to frost and transportable by air, are betraying those great men of the past."

"You are raving, Fyodor!" interrupted Sharov.

"I wish I were. But I'm not. Unfortunately all this is no dream. That's what comes of abstract investigations. But enough of this. It would have been much more rational and cost less, too, to have said to you ten years ago: 'Look here, Shumsky, here's a flat for you, here's money, here's a car for you to drive—only give us your word of honour you won't butt into science.' What have you done at The Streams? Hampered their great and important work. You don't realize that our new state, the first of its kind in history, has given rise to a new sort of science, Soviet science, a science which says: there is nothing Man cannot do!"

Lopatin fell silent, then repeated to himself: "Nothing!"

"Have you finished, Professor Lopatin?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps now you are ready to beg my pardon. In your vehemence you as good as called me an enemy of the people."

"I haven't called you that yet, but I may. And others will join me. It isn't enough for you yourself to have gone up a blind alley; you are doing everything in your power to make other scientists devote themselves to problems just as abstract, just as isolated from reality. Many have made the mistake of falling under your influence. I too was blind. He—" here Lopatin indicated Sharov—"made a mistake. No wonder you need him.

"He hasn't as yet discovered a new path for his branch of science, but he would never stoop to deny facts in order to confirm a pet theory of his. And when he realizes he has been in the wrong, he won't spare himself; he will change his entire work. He serves science religiously, he has never been swayed by thoughts of personal gain or glory. The name of Sharov is great and unsullied. Very convenient for you to hide behind. You can get many followers by saying 'Sharov is on our side'. And you bought Khrust with a Doctor's Degree."

"There was a time when you and Khrust seemed to get on all right."

"The story of Khrust is a very simple one: promotion went to his head. There are still many people who cannot stand promotion. They work well as long as they occupy humble positions, but they lose their heads as soon as they are promoted. Khrust's is a common case—yours is worse. You are more dangerous. So far, I have argued with you, Professor Shumsky. And I was wrong to do so. From this day on I shall fight you. Bear that in mind."

Fyodor Fyodorovich knew he was not alone in what he said. With him were Gromada, Chebrets, and many others. And he thought he had put the matter in such a

way that Sharov would be won over—that he could not fail to understand and be won over.

But Sharov jumped up off the sofa and shouted in his high voice:

"You're impossible, Fyodor! Simply impossible! You are imputing to Shumsky things of which he is not guilty."

"You are, Lopatin," said Shumsky sharply. "What you are doing will have evil consequences. You yourself have said that the world is threatened by war, that we have many enemies. If that is so, then we Soviet scientists should stand together and help one another. And you are sowing discord. You are rousing the students and professors against me and accusing me of holding bourgeois theories. Ultimately you will be the one to lose your position and not I, do you understand? You will be dismissed for slander and intrigue."

"Shumsky is right," put in Sharov. "Perfectly right. No one objects to your arguing on questions of method. But you are unjustly accusing Professor Shumsky of committing political mistakes. When you begin quarrelling with people about everything, you make it hard for them to work. You have no right to insult an honest Soviet scientist."

"Well, here's what I want to say to you, Nikolai Alexandrovich," said Lopatin. "You have ceased to understand a number of things. Yes—we must join forces, but we must rally round the banner of a Soviet approach to science. And there can be no peace and tranquillity in our faculty or in the field of biology as a whole, until we have got rid of all harmful elements. Choose which side you are on, Nikolai Alexandrovich—ours or theirs."

Shumsky narrowed his eyes as he looked at Lopatin. And in their very depths could be detected a glint of animal fear. He remembered the meeting at the biological station. The students had applauded Lopatin's speech,

and now Shumsky found something menacing in that applause.

An attack was being made on the little world he had won for himself by fighting tooth and nail—the snug, indifferent little world which he inhabited as a snail inhabits its shell. He had crawled out on to a burdock-leaf, and, like the snail, supposed that the burdock-leaf was the entire universe.

He had learned what words he must use to make people trust him. He was accustomed to having everything he needed given him with a generous hand. And he could not realize that his demands, desires, vain dreams, and concern for his own well-being, were not shared by the people about him. He did not understand Lopatin. Lopatin had no need for the things Shumsky found essential. Lopatin's idea of happiness and unhappiness, of joy and purpose, was inaccessible to the understanding of Shumsky. He lived in a world of different proportions, with different needs and desires.

There was a time in Lopatin's life when he had had to toil in utmost poverty. Only after the Revolution did he begin to breathe freely. Only then was he sure that his wife would not have to go out into the bitter frost in a light summer coat any more, and that if a son were born to them, he would have a happy future before him. He knew his friends would no longer suffer need and could work peacefully and freely. The Revolution gave him everything, and he received it all with gratitude. He never thought of it any more.

Sharov walked heavily about the room. He was greatly perturbed. For some reason—perhaps because he was worn out by the demands made on him by Lopatin, or perhaps because he had faith in Shumsky's talent and sincerity—he simply could not understand what Lopatin was accusing him of and why he insulted Shumsky the way he did. His trusting disposition made this doubly

difficult. He, too, could not understand Shumsky's world of petty, selfish interests. Sharov loved his work and thought he was doing what was right and necessary. He had done his share—it was not given to everyone to make great discoveries, was it? He was a simple labourer, one who tills the field on which others sow. He felt that he did not deserve Lopatin's rebukes, which were becoming more and more frequent.

Shumsky got up.

"Evidently you *will* have to make a choice, Nikolai Alexandrovich. I'm afraid that in the future it will be difficult for you to remain my friend and the friend of Professor Lopatin at the same time. I too have had just about enough. I will not allow anyone to insult me in this way. People will come to my defence. You can be sure there *are* such people. You will be told by the proper authorities, Professor Lopatin, that in our country one cannot with impunity call an honest man an enemy of the people."

"I am ready to answer before our Party and before our people for every word I say, everything I do," said Lopatin. "I'll have to answer for you, and for Khrust, too. And I shall have to admit this fault of mine: I failed to see what was happening; I let you have your way."

"Enough," said Shumsky. "Enough. We shall continue this conversation elsewhere."

"We shall," acquiesced Lopatin coldly. "I'm glad we have begun it at last."

Sharov listened to them in trepidation.

"I want to work in peace," he said, glancing into their faces beseechingly. "You can't turn science into warfare, Fyodor. Either you must apologize to Shumsky, or—"

"Or what?" interrupted Lopatin.

He looked into Sharov's eyes—pleasant, round eyes, faded though they were with age. For forty years this man had met him with a smile, had rejoiced with him over every triumph, wept with him over every grief. He had

said to Chebrets confidently: "Sharov? I'll answer for Sharov." But he had been wrong. How wrong!

There was something fateful about leaving. It cost him physical effort to go through the door. It seemed to him that with his going the roof would cave in. Shunsky had taken Sharov away from him. He had offered him an easier way of life than that demanded by Lopatin. He would no longer be expected to fight, to become enthusiastic, to throw his whole soul into things. But Lopatin had no use for an empty, subdued Sharov, craving an illusory peace and quiet. Such a Sharov was only a shell. The youthful, vital Sharov whom Lopatin needed had grown withered and faded and wanted nothing but seclusion.

With a last look round the room, Lopatin went out.

CHAPTER 19

Once outside, Lopatin looked helplessly about him. Never before had he felt so alone. Chebrets had left. Gromada was asleep. So were all the students. He could not return to Sharov. Not now. There was nothing to return to.

Though the door of his house had remained open, the smell of scorched metal still hung in the air.

Everyone had gone. They had come, stirred things up, and gone. Leaving him alone. Why must he be alone tonight? Chebrets, of course, had had to catch his train. But Gromada? Couldn't he have waited half an hour or so, at least until he returned from Sharov's?

Fyodor Fyodorovich plugged in the electric stove. He must have a cup of tea or coffee—anything, so long as it was hot. Too bad that the tea-kettle had come unsoldered.

Through the open window he could see the dark and

silent houses of the biological station, their windows gleaming faintly in the moonlight. Everyone was asleep.

And Maxim—what was the good of him? Who ever heard of a son who was never near his father? When he wasn't wanted, there he was, pestering him with tales about snakes. But now, when he *was* wanted, he wasn't here. Nobody was here.

He shouldn't have let Chebrets go. He could have slept on the cot. Lopatin himself would have slept on a sheepskin on the floor. Very comfortable.

Chebrets would have snored every now and then, and it wouldn't have been so quiet.

Maxim always snored lightly after falling asleep, and the hardest, most complicated thoughts would then be stilled and come right. And Lopatin's heart would be light. If the worst came to the worst, he could always wake up his son and talk to him.

Why had Maxim taken it into his head that he had to go after his snakes again?

Fyodor Fyodorovich took a seat by the window, turned off the electric stove, and fell back on a familiar course of consolation—musing about his son....

His son had been just as unmanageable as his father, and had given his parents just as much trouble as any other unmanageable son. First there had been bruises, torn knickers, broken boots which had had to be repaired every other week, blots in his exercise-books. Lopatin's wife had been in despair, but Fyodor Fyodorovich only smiled. Healthy lad, must have exercise. Falling off trees? He sent him up himself. And he *did* draw nests.

Fyodor Fyodorovich's wife was a teacher—chemistry instructor in a school. She was upset when Maxim, who was really quite clever, brought home low marks. But Fyodor Fyodorovich consoled her. How had it come about? Was it because he was lazy? Oh, no! They had seen him reading Pavlov, and he scamped his home

work. Got carried away. And by something worth-while. He'd make up for that mark another time. He'd be sure to.

"Enthusiasm is all very well," said the mother, "but duty is duty."

Fyodor Fyodorovich had not yielded.

"Look at that pupil of yours—Vadik, isn't he? Conscientious, accurate, does his home-work, lives to schedule. That's splendid. I'm not saying it isn't. That's as it should be. But your Vadik is never carried away by anything. Has there been a single night when he was so deep in a book that he couldn't go to sleep?"

To her chagrin, his wife had found nothing to say to this, and the triumphant Fyodor Fyodorovich relentlessly pressed his point.

"Some people are so talented that they have enough in them for enthusiasms and high marks too. But I find your Vadiks a bit disquieting. You teach chemistry, now. And you're a good teacher. A fine teacher. Well, have you been able to rouse his enthusiasm for chemistry? Not a bit! So there. If you had, he would have known happiness for the first time in his life. He would have begun reading books on chemistry, making experiments, something or other would explode in a test-tube, and at that moment he'd be sure to get a four, or even a three for, say, literature. Or let's say he got keen on literature and neglected your chemistry. Well, he'd go to you and say: 'Yelena Dmitrievna, I didn't sleep all night. I was reading Tolstoy. I understood him for the first time in my life. And I had no time to learn the formula you gave us. But I will, honest I will.' Would you have scolded him? You would have looked into his eyes and seen that they were heavy with sleep. That's what youth is for—to burn, to seek, to make mistakes, and seek again. Your Vadik gets nothing but top marks. But is he a member of any circle? Not he! Is he in love with any subject? Not he! And he has any amount of spare time. And there's any amount of

room in his mind, too. If he were to come to me I should say to him: 'Young man, you're very good and industrious, but there's no fire in you. Why have you come to me? Are you a geologist, a chemist, a poet?' Our schools must help people to find themselves, not just turn out model scholars. And our Maxim isn't lazy. Don't you worry, at last he's fallen in love with a subject. And you and I have something to do with it. He'll be all right. He'll be a good scholar. And he'll learn to combine enthusiasm and duty. That has to be learned, too.

"And the great thing is, Lena, to take control the moment a child has found himself. So long as nothing really touches him, the teacher is powerless. There's no way of getting at him, of guiding him. Maxim is in my hands now. You were always asking how he was to be punished. Remember when you made him stand in the corner? And he didn't understand what for, and stood there for a bit, and then said: 'It's so dull Mums, can't I have a book or something?' He just didn't understand. Beat him? Absurd. And now everything's clear—if he gets a bad mark again, I won't let him go to the Zoo for a week. Another bad mark, and I'll take Pavlov away from him. But are *any* measures necessary? The deeper he gets into his subject, the better he'll realize what chemistry and physics are for."

And just as Fyodor Fyodorovich had prophesied, Maxim had plunged deeper and deeper into science. And then came another cause for sorrow.

Fyodor Fyodorovich was quite interested in reptiles—snakes, crocodiles, lizards—but much less than in other animals. Fyodor Fyodorovich had hoped that like himself Maxim would choose the zoology of fur-bearing animals as his main speciality and go in for breeding and scientific hunting. And as his son grew up and it became clear that he was a zoologist by right of inheritance, Fyodor Fyodorovich hoped to have Maxim help him in his work.

Maxim joined a young naturalists' circle and came back from the Zoo bursting with stories about sables, beavers and foxes—and very intelligent stories they were. But one day Fyodor Fyodorovich turned into the Zoo on his way from the university. He had often given talks to the young naturalists' circle, and the first young naturalist he met recognized him and hastened to inform him that Maxim was in the terrarium. So Fyodor Fyodorovich turned his steps in the direction of the terrarium. A broad stone stairway with irregular steps led up to it. From recesses with low domed roofs and wire gratings right in the rock came the rustling sound made by the dry skins of cobras, the bulging eyes of crocodiles looked sleepily at the awed spectators, a python hung motionless in a heavy knot from a branch. Fyodor Fyodorovich halted, angrily lighting his pipe. So that was it! All his dreams of Maxim helping him breed new species of fur-bearing animals vanished like smoke. Maxim appeared in the doorway of the terrarium and began making his way carefully towards his father, by the steep, irregular steps. In his arms, its scaly feet hanging helpless, lay a green crocodile, opening and shutting its fanged jaws. It was not a very big one, but Fyodor Fyodorovich watched anxiously as Maxim bore it to the railings and let it down lovingly on to the green grass.

"I've brought the baby out for a sun-bath," he said, shooting an amicable glance at his father, as if he realized that there was no going back now.

"Do you ever think of your mother?" said Fyodor Fyodorovich, unable to repress his feelings. If Maxim had been carrying a bear or a tiger Fyodor Fyodorovich would have been neither astonished nor alarmed. These were familiar beasts, their habits were well-known, and they could be tamed. But what the devil did he want with this green thing? Maxim, however, was serenely unaware of his father's fears.

"I'm warming him," he said. "He's had no sun all winter."

Fyodor Fyodorovich's face clouded over, but he said nothing. He realized that it was too late to do anything about it.

After this, Maxim let himself go completely, and spoke of nothing but his favourites.

"What an appetite!" he would exclaim enthusiastically, telling them of a python which had eaten a little pig and a rabbit at one meal.

He gradually collected a pair of cheerful toads, three lizards, and, finally, a huge cobra with eyes like drops of molten lead. In one of the medical institutes experiments in the curative qualities of cobra-poison were being made. So Maxim placed a glass slide in the box where he kept the cobra, and when the snake, enraged, snapped at the slide, it left on it two yellowish, transparent drops of poison. A very youthful, austere laboratory assistant carried off the slide with the poison to the institute, and the delighted Maxim said to his father:

"See—the cobra's quite tame."

But he did not stop at a cobra, and was continually bringing frogs, snakes and other 'vermin', as his mother called them, into the house. One day, without the slightest warning, Maxim placed on the table before his parents a heaving pallid mass with red goggle eyes—a hideous creature.

"An albino toad—very rare," he explained triumphantly, stroking the creature tenderly on its slimy, wart-covered back. Despite his mother's entreaties and her assurances that not everyone likes frogs, Maxim displayed this treasure to all who came to the house. Guests did not usually express any enthusiasm. The only person who showed interest in the unique specimen was Sharov, who had made a collection of all sorts of extremely interest-

ing snakes and frogs; in fact, his study was turned into a terrarium, much to his wife's despair.

Very soon a tragedy occurred. Sharov stole the toad. Maxim was profoundly upset.

"Look, I only went into my room for a minute," he told his father, "to get his present—I gave him a crocodile tooth and a cobra-skin. I took him by the arm going downstairs, out of respect, you know. And when I got back the albino was gone. Disappeared. I rang up Professor Sharov and all he said was: 'You're getting disrespectful to your elders, Maxim.' And laughed. Fancy! Then I remembered that he kept his left side towards me all the time when he went out. He must have had it in his right pocket."

Fyodor Fyodorovich had some difficulty in making Sharov return the toad to Maxim. But Sharov had evidently not known how to look after it, for three days after its return home the toad died. And many years later, when Maxim became one of Sharov's students and, like all the students, enjoyed his lectures, he could not help every now and then mentally reproaching his professor for the toad's untimely end.

Although his university studies kept him busy, Maxim went on working in the terrarium. He went away every summer, leaving his charges to the care of Oleg, a lanky youth, who was deeply attached to Maxim and his snakes.

Maxim roamed the desert, caught snakes, got every possible form of tropical fever, slept in ruins, his rucksack under his head, travelled on asses, on camels and on foot, sending letters home from remote places whose names sounded like the names of beauteous damsels from *The Arabian Nights*.

His letters were as brief as telegrams. His telegrams as long and detailed as letters. He dispatched the telegrams in an unbroken series, on several forms, two or three days running, and always at times when he felt

the need of immediate communication with his own people. The letters he only wrote when he had nothing to say, but remembered that "Mums had told him to write".

Maxim graduated from the university in 1941, and immediately set off on one of his desperate journeys. They had received the last telegram from him just before the war. It was a long telegram, showing that their son was home-sick. "Just caught a splendid cobra," Maxim informed them triumphantly; "been to post-office but no letters stop my camel and I are tired." Fyodor Fyodorovich had found the telegram in his letter-box on one of his visits home from the biological station. The flat was utterly quiet—his wife was at a sanatorium. Everything smelt of dust.

That evening Oleg, Maxim's assistant, came to see Lopatin. War had broken out and he had received orders to destroy all poisonous snakes.

"Maxim Fyodorovich will kill me," declared Oleg, clutching his head. "We have the rarest specimens. You must explain to him that I was bound, as a Komsomol member, to obey orders." Oleg looked imploringly at Fyodor Fyodorovich. "You will explain, won't you?"

Fyodor Fyodorovich went to the terrarium with him. There was a trial alarm that night.

They chloroformed the snakes. Maxim knew each one of them, he had caught them, studied them, written essays on them, and intended to make them the subject of his academic thesis. Every one of them was interesting and essential to him. And now they lay on the zinc-topped table—cold, grey, like dangling ribbons—and a smell of chloroform hung about the stone cell with the wire gratings.

Maxim arrived by air a week later, and left for the front the next morning.

Now Fyodor Fyodorovich could look back on all these perturbations with satisfaction. Everything in his son's

life was a joy to him. And the memory of the years of the deepest anxiety, the war years, was made sacred to him by the courage and valour his son had displayed at the front.

Maxim had been officer of a reconnoitre unit and his ability to walk long distances, to swim, to endure heat and cold, and to creep noiselessly up on poisonous reptiles, was, here as nowhere else, of the utmost use.

And yet, up to this night, it had always seemed to Fyodor Fyodorovich that Maxim's life was still very short, very uncomplicated. But suddenly he realized it had taken him all night to review this life. Day was beginning to dawn. An early morning chill was stealing into the room. Yes, even Maxim's life had been a long one. And he was far away, and Fyodor Fyodorovich's wife was in Moscow.

Fyodor Fyodorovich glanced angrily at the rumpled empty bed. He leaned out of the window. Gradually the tips of the pines took on a reddish hue, as if rusting in the damp morning air. Five o'clock. He often finished work at that hour. He loved to work at night. Sharov, on the contrary, got up early—at five or half past. But in his youth Sharov had been fond of sleep. So had Fyodor Fyodorovich. Gradually they had begun to go to bed later, get up earlier. Old age, insomnia.

Often he had telephoned to Sharov at five or six in the morning to tell him about the night's work. That was all over now. He would never do that again. Nor would he ever wait for Victor again. And Maxim was far away.

It was cold and dark in the little house, surrounded as it was by thick foliage. Through the window he could see the grass coming to colour on the hill-side. Someone ran down the hill for a swim. Someone else began to sing. A girl laughed.

Why had he been so anxious for morning to come? Here it was, and he felt even worse than during the night.... Shumsky, Belevsky, Sharov.... Perhaps

Sharov was right in valuing his peace above everything else. He was right—it was too late to fight and argue: they were too old. One must not make mistakes in old age.

Chebrets and Gromada could fight. They had plenty of time ahead of them. Everything lay ahead of them.

Phew! How the place reeked of smoke! Last night's stale tobacco smoke. The window had been open all night, but the smell hung on. They had been smoking, all three....

Lopatin went out of the house, slamming the door behind him. He felt worse and worse. Here was Sharov's house. The car was gone—Shumsky had returned to town. Nikita came running down the path. He would be sure to ask him if Belevsky had come back.

Fyodor Fyodorovich turned off the path into the woods. The birds were singing as usual, but Lopatin did not notice them. He plodded heavily ahead like a bear, pushing through the underbrush, seeing nothing. For the first time in his life he had no feeling for the woods. He did not listen to the song of the birds nor sniff the odour of the herbs. He had none of that tense, acute concentration so characteristic of him when he was in the woods.

Just above his head darted a tree-pipit. Fyodor Fyodorovich usually loved its song, but now he did not hear it and did not see the pipit. He had stopped being a biologist; his eyes did not distinguish the birds, his ears did not hear the murmur of the forest.

Over and over again he blamed himself. How could he have failed to offer timely resistance to those who had now ruined his best friend, who had made his best pupil turn traitor, who were undermining Soviet science, who had defiled walls which to him were holy? Most hard to bear was the sense of his own guilt.

If only he, Professor Lopatin, and his friends and comrades had realized what was happening earlier—perhaps only two or three years earlier!

He kept on torturing and punishing himself. He felt the weight of his years, realized that he was old, weak, worn out by a sleepless night and by a long life. Worn out, and still he could not sit down or lie down or even come to a halt. Too great was his pain, anxiety and bitterness. His heart beat loudly and spasmodically, as if someone were squeezing it, keeping him from breathing.

His sensitive ear caught the sound of a high melodious whistle, and he was instantly alert. The whistle resembled the oriole's song—a pure and lovely trill, tangible and strong, like a stream of water. It seemed to make the very leaves stir.

But it was not an oriole singing. It was a human being whistling, giving a musical and exact reproduction of the song of the bird.

Fyodor Fyodorovich stopped and withdrew into some nut-bushes, eagerly awaiting a repetition of the notes which had brought him the minute's rest he so desired. He looked at the green of the foliage, still wet with dew, as if he had never seen it before. The beating of his heart grew more even, and he gripped a moist bough as he might have gripped the hand of a friend. In front of him rose a fir-tree, not very tall, and in the thick of its branches he caught sight of a familiar little nest made of ferns. Out of it slipped a wren, which swooped to the ground as swiftly as a falling stone. It was one of Fyodor Fyodorovich's old friends—the same wren that had once built its nest in the gully. Fyodor Fyodorovich was as much a biologist as ever; he concluded that the old nest on the path leading to the river, along which students were constantly passing, was in too noisy a spot, and so the wren had decided to build a new one here. A warm smile lighted Lopatin's face, smoothing out the wrinkles in his forehead. He took a cautious step forward.

This time the whistle was imitating not an oriole, but the call of the thrush. Fyodor Fyodorovich moved the branches aside and saw a sweet and familiar face. Marina Dimkova was sitting there, and beside her were Katya Belkina, Varya and Lyuba.

"Now imitate a chaffinch," said Varya.

A smile flitted across Marina's face; evidently she was seeing the cheerful little bird in her mind's eye, and presently its song rose above the clearing. A chaffinch with an ear less discriminating than Professor Lopatin's answered Marina, and the girls listened to its call, so like the one Marina had just whistled. Varya gave a little laugh, and the laugh, too, was very much like a bird-song.

"How many songs does a chaffinch sing in the course of the day?" asked Varya sternly, obviously in imitation of Vera Vasilevna. Fyodor Fyodorovich chuckled to himself.

"A daily score," answered Marina, "of 2990."

The girls laughed. Fyodor Fyodorovich smiled. He knew it was not because they were able to count all the songs the chaffinch sang that they were laughing: it was because it was such fun to count them and because this summer in the woods was just a beginning, and these calculations were mere training, and before them stretched a long life of real scientific work. And also because it was summer, and there were flowers and sunshine all around, and they were young and just could not help laughing.

Now he realized what was going on.

Katya Belkina was preparing to take an examination in zoology. Her group had taken the botany exam first, and now Marina, Varya and Lyuba, who had already passed zoology, were "putting her through her paces". For some time Fyodor Fyodorovich stood there, hidden in the foliage, listening to the girls discussing the birds.



themselves chirruping like birds. He learned many curious things, among them the latest news about his favourite wren. His conjecture that the bird had abandoned its bachelor nest and built a new one here on the fir-tree turned out to have been correct. The wren had soon found himself a wife—evidently she had been only too glad to marry him, considering that the grounds round his nest covered almost a hectare. According to the laws of the forest, no other wren had a right to settle on this territory. He already had children—six of them—but this did not frighten him. He could easily feed his family with such lands at his disposal.

There was a chaffinch living on this same territory. He was a pugnacious chaffinch, had fought with two other chaffinches and frightened off some goldfinches that had inadvertently made inroads into his domain. But according to Varya's observations, the chaffinch tolerated the wren.

"Why?" asked Katya.

Varya did not answer immediately. She was sitting with her back to Fyodor Fyodorovich, but he could picture the look of concentration on her face.

"I'm not sure," she replied at last, "but I think it's because the wren seeks its food on the ground, and the chaffinch never does."

At present the chaffinch had no time to pick quarrels. His children had just been hatched and demanded food. Their insatiable red beaks were always yawning above the nest in expectation of food. The chaffinch's wife took good care of them; whenever she brought a big caterpillar, she would divide it up among all of them. Not so the father. He was very haphazard—just stuffed his caterpillar down the first throat that presented itself, almost choking that fledgling and letting the others go hungry.

Fyodor Fyodorovich brightened as he listened to the girls' chatter, though their bird-stories were not new to

him—he himself could have told them thousands of tales about wrens and chaffinches. Varya's next observation brought him almost to a state of happiness. The wren, she said, observed a very strict daily regime while building its nest: in the morning it hunted on the far side of the gully, where gnats were dancing in the sunshine; when it had made a good meal, it returned home and worked from four to six on the building of its nest, bringing grass from the slopes of the gully and plucking moss out of a log lying nearby.

Once more Fyodor Fyodorovich felt drawn to Varya. How clever of her to have observed something he himself had missed! His admiration for the wren, too, increased, and he turned to tell him so, but the wren was gone. No time to sit here twittering! The children must be fed!

The girls grew quiet as they listened to the birds. From time to time Marina would say teasingly:

"What bird is that?... And that?"

She must have had an exceptionally musical ear, for she knew the phrases, trills and calls of every bird. The other girls were not so sure of them, and they listened with strained attention, trying to catch the elusive notes. Which is that—the blackcap? The song-thrush? The titmouse?

"Oh, girls, I'm sure to fail the exam!" wailed Katya. "I don't know half of them!"

"Get Boris to help you," advised Lyuba. "He's a perfect prompter. The first group used him."

This was almost too much for Fyodor Fyodorovich; he shook with silent laughter.

And suddenly he realized that he was not so old, or so weak. There was still some strength in the old dog. He would yet put in some good work. A great law of truth and justice operated in this world, and this law would do away with Shumsky and Khrust and all the rubbish with which they were cluttering up life. And he

would hear Sharov's beloved falsetto for many years to come. And all that was dark and ugly would disappear, just as the things he had fought in the past had disappeared, for he had always marched in the ranks of men who were good and just and honest.

In front of him was this flock of girls, so like a flock of birds. And it was just because he, old Professor Lopatin, along with many generations of Russians, had laboured in their interests, had fought and overcome the foe for the sake of their happiness, that now they could be so young and gay and carefree, and could call so merrily to the birds and the sun and the leafy trees. And it was he who had trained these girls who were destined to see things he had only dreamed of, and to give form and substance to the things his mind had conceived during long, wakeful nights. That was what was fundamental in his life, fundamental as the earth on which he stood, the fresh woodland air which he breathed, and the lofty blue vault of heaven from which came these warm rays of morning sun.

When Professor Lopatin went over to the girls, he was that same Fyodor Fyodorovich they knew—a wise, serene, and happy old man.

CHAPTER 20

A day off was announced. After an amateur concert and a ball in the woods, there would be a trip to town for all who cared to go.

At four o'clock in the afternoon the house in which the girls lived was filled with the odour of shampoo and singed hair. Lyuba had brought some curling-tongs to the woods with her—heavy tongs with carved handles that had once belonged to her grandmother. Such a handsome apparatus could not be allowed to go to waste, and

Lyuba's red curls received the first attention. Varya too was coaxed into submitting to the operation, but before it was completed, Vera Vasilievna came for her.

"Hurry—Fyodor Fyodorovich is waiting for you," she said. "He's on his way to the fox-farm at The Streams."

Varya cast a wistful glance at the dress laid out on her bed.

"Run along, we'll press it for you," said Lyuba. "But don't be late getting back."

One of the chief numbers on the evening's programme was to be a duet from *Yevgeni Onegin*, sung by Marina and Varya.

Fyodor Fyodorovich looked at Varya in surprise. Never before had he seen her so flushed and excited—and with those two tight golden curlicues over her forehead.

"Your hair's rather disordered to-day," he said.

As they walked along, Varya kept furtively pressing out the curls which Fyodor Fyodorovich had failed to appreciate. But Lyuba had been so conscientious that they did not yield to Varya's efforts.

They found The Streams quiet and deserted. Practically everyone had gone to work in the fields. A prolonged spell of rain had just come to an end, but there were frequent thunder-storms, and the members of the kolkhoz tried to make use of every "dry" minute. Though the sky was almost clear, the air was heavy, the birds were chirping, the frogs croaking as they did before rain. Clouds were gathering on the horizon.

The cage was now more worthy of the imposing sign "Fox-Farm" which adorned it. Beside the red fox and the silver fox, there were some cubs playing in a corner which had been partitioned off for them. They were bigger now, and Anna had given Shura full charge of them, a responsibility which had quite gone to her head.

As manager of so large an institution, Shura had taken upon herself the responsibility of increasing her staff.

She enlisted a "fox-squad" consisting of three members—the three brightest and most belligerent boys in the school.

Shura had no use for girls. They could not be depended on—they either forgot things or mixed them up, and they wasted too much time talking. And they had too many home duties, such as getting dinner, tidying up the house, watering the garden, and, most important of all, looking after younger brothers and sisters. Shura needed people she could rely on at all times. There was a great deal of work to be done at the farm. Not only had the animals to be fed and the cage cleaned, but all the instructions of Professor Lopatin had to be carried out and a diary kept. This last task Shuna entrusted to no one but herself.

She let the boys do the dirty work; they washed the food bowls, cleaned the cage, and "provided nourishment", as Shura said. "Providing nourishment" was not a simple task, for Shura fed her foxes according to the latest scientific theories, adding albumen, vitamins and fats to their food, which was of the highest quality.

When the boys had already taken over their duties, a certain Vasya appeared and begged permission to be "seconded" to the fox-squad, swearing he would observe all the rules. Shuna took pity on him and signed him on.

It was at a tragic moment that Fyodor Fyodorovich and Varya arrived at the farm. One of the little foxes had fallen ill. Its round little stomach was swollen, it could not use its front paws, it jerked and coughed, opening wide its triangular mouth. Shuna danced frantically about the sufferer.

"It's choking," said Fyodor Fyodorovich. "Open up its mouth and see what's inside."

Shura gently took up the little fox, opened its mouth and pushed a finger down its narrow throat. It was dreadful to watch the poor creature. It choked and jerked

more than ever, and its narrow red tongue lolled out of its mouth. Shura felt something and pulled it out. It proved to be a tiny fish. After the fish came a piece of cord. After the cord—another little fish. Again the cord, again a fish, again the cord . . . a whole string of fish!

The little fox jumped out of Shura's hands, sat down, gave a deep sigh, licked its chops, and gazed with some regret at the fish. Shura hurled them at the feet of the unhappy Vasya, who was standing beside the cage nervously clutching a fishing-rod, irrefutable proof of his guilt.

"You fool!" shouted Shura wrathfully. "Who gave you permission to feed the animals without the consent of the head of the farm? How dare you violate our feeding-rules? Don't you know we only give the foxes ground-up fish? How can they digest whole fish—and on a string at that! The way you asked and begged to join the squad! Swore you'd observe all the rules! And now look what you've done!"

The "seconded" Vasya hung his head and said nothing.

Trying hard not to laugh, Fyodor Fyodorovich and Varya moved off to one side. Vasya attempted to mumble a few words in self-defence, but Shura would have none of it.

"You're out of the fox-squad and that's all!" She did not even turn round as he walked away—slowly, reluctantly, dragging his ill-starred fishing-rod behind him. Every line of his retreating figure expressed the most bitter remorse.

Shura now turned to receive her guests. She had instantly guessed that this was Professor Lopatin, about whom Anna had told her so much, and this girl must be one of his students. She received them graciously, invited them to take a seat on the bench near the cage, and prepared herself for a scientific discussion.

The fox-farm had acquired not only a bench, but a little house as well, in which Shura kept her diary, scales, mincing-machine, combs, dust-pan—in a word, all essential implements. There too she had medicine, a thermometer and bandage in case of emergency.

Shura was exceedingly proud that the professor had seen her save the life of the little fox. The professor looked at her benevolently, then looked at the foxes, expressed his approval, and said: "Turning red?" They *were* turning red; Fyodor Fyodorovich's prophecy was coming true. Shura and Anna had hoped the little foxes would take after their father, but apparently the only one that took after him was the one he ate.

The foxes were inexorably turning red and everyone teased Shura and Anna, as if it was their fault that sharp, shiny little red hairs kept pushing their way through the thick, dark coats. Not a day passed but someone would ask sarcastically: "Turning red?"

"Yes, they're turning red," Anna would admit sullenly.

"That's because you don't know how to take care of them," the tormentor would say.

Shura too was disappointed by the foxes' change in colour, but not so much as Anna. What did a child care whether the foxes were red or silver? The important thing was that they were tame!

To deepen the impression she made upon her guests, Shura again entered the cage, although there was nothing for her to do there. The foxes came running to meet her. They were clean and brushed, had long straight paws, were in the best of spirits, and consisted almost wholly of triangles—faces, ears, tails. They rubbed up against her legs, wagged their tails madly, and gave happy little barks. At this moment it made not the slightest difference to Shura that they were not silver foxes—although if they had been the more expensive silver

foxes, instead of just plain red ones, the practical-minded Zakhar Petrovich would no doubt have come to inspect them: Shura, who was very proud of her farm, made ready to receive him every day. But the chairman did not come. Shura, of course, could not know all the trouble these foxes had caused him.

Fyodor Fyodorovich entered the little house, glanced about and inquired into the most minute details of Shura's work. She gave a serious, thoughtful answer to every question. Fyodor Fyodorovich noticed the note-book on the table.

"Your diary?" he asked.

She nodded, too frightened to speak.

"Let me see it."

There was nothing to it but to hand the book over. The professor read everything attentively. He smiled at one point, and showed Shura and Varya two figures. Shura blushed crimson. It seemed that on the 15th of the month the tail of one of the cubs was 22 centimetres long, and on the 17th, only 21. Of course the tail could not have shrunk, but Shura, being very honest, had written down just what the measurements told her. Fyodor Fyodorovich praised her for her scrupulousness, and said the mistake was quite natural and excusable. It wasn't easy to measure the tail of a live fox which kept turning and twisting and wrenching itself out of one's hands.

"Why, even this student of mine," indicating Varya, "makes such mistakes sometimes." He stopped to consider a moment and then said approvingly: "One centimetre? That is quite a permissible deviation."

Varya was annoyed with Fyodor Fyodorovich. Why should he humiliate her in front of this schoolgirl? It was much easier for Shura than for her—Shura's foxes were tame, while Varya's were wild. But Fyodor Fyodorovich seemed to be indifferent to Varya's feelings, for

he turned right back to the diary. It was awful for Shura to have to stand there and watch him read. She was dreadfully upset, but she tried not to show it. What should she do—run and call Anna?

She decided she should.

"Just a minute," she said, and vanished.

Fyodor Fyodorovich kept on reading. The diary had no artistic merits, but it was amazingly thorough. There could be no doubt that Shura's talents ran more to biology than to literature. She showed preference for an involved style. For example, she wrote that the little foxes had been removed from the cage "by the two-hand method". Once in a while she let the mother-fox in with her little ones, now that they were older. The mother-fox had strongly objected to having her babies taken away from her. And so it had been necessary to employ the following ruse: a little tug was given to the hind end of the mat on which the mother-fox was lying, and as soon as she turned her head, one of the little foxes was swiftly snatched from under her.

The diary further noted that "when a human climbs into the cage, the cubs are sure to lift up their heads and look at the human".

Shura considered the cage too small, and therefore took the foxes out walking on a leash. Five pages of the diary were devoted to the description of the first "walk". At the least noise, they would hide behind "their trainer". They were frightened by loud noises, such as the rattle of a cart over the bridge, the sound of a motor cycle, tractor, or aeroplane. From the wrathful tone of this entry it was clear that Shura considered it expedient to curtail traffic in the neighbourhood of her farm.

It was also stated that the fox-cubs showed an undue interest in chickens, a thing not to be permitted "if we don't want to have trouble with the chicken-farm".

The personalities of the cubs were also described. The older was lively and affectionate, but "not very self-reliant", according to Shura. The younger was enterprising to the point of being "presumptuous".

Varya read the diary over Fyodor Fyodorovich's shoulder. She liked it; she even felt that her own diary was dry in comparison, and that she was inclined to leave out many interesting details.

Fyodor Fyodorovich seemed to be impressed by the diary, for when Shura came back and said, all out of breath: "Anna Semyonovna has gone to the party over at your station, and the Secretary is on his way here," Fyodor Fyodorovich gave her a look which the experienced Varya knew to mean that Shura was as good as enrolled in the zoology department of Moscow University.

Fyodor Fyodorovich told Varya that she should include material from Shura's diary in the paper she was going to read to the members of the zoology circle. The idea of the paper had evidently just been born, for Varya had never heard of it before. But there was no point in arguing, so she entered upon a long, detailed discussion with Shura.

The discussion was interesting and presented Varya with an opportunity to gather facts on the subject she had just chosen as her life's work. But at the moment she had little desire to talk. She wanted to get back to the party. It had been such a long time since she had danced! And they were counting on her to sing in that duet. That consideration somewhat justified her in her own eyes. She had every right to look upon her singing not as a pleasure but as a duty imposed upon her by the Komsomol organization. Could anything that made her so nervous be called a pleasure? And still she was ashamed of herself. Why was it that 15-year-old Shura, who had also been invited to the party, could go on talking so calmly and seriously?

At that moment a car drove up, out of which stepped Zakhar Vasilievich and another man whom Fyodor Fyodorovich and Varya had never seen before. Shura threw them a wrathful glance: they had almost run into the cage!

"So you've come to inspect the 'blot on our scutch-eon'?" said Zakhar Vasilievich.

"Why do you say that? The foxes are getting along nicely, and they are in excellent hands," said Fyodor Fyodorovich amiably. "Excellent hands," he repeated.

"No good trying to console me. Here's the man who can show you foxes—Sizov, chairman of The Dawn Kolkhoz."

"I've heard a lot about your foxes," said Fyodor Fyodorovich, gnasping the man's hand warmly. "How are they getting on?"

"Oh, all right," replied Sizov modestly.

"Here's what I wanted to talk to you about, Fyodor Fyodorovich," said Zakhar Vasilievich, lowering his voice as if he feared being overheard by Zakhar Petrovich. "The same thing we spoke about some time ago: merging this measly effort—" (nodding in the direction of the cage, to Shura's deep mortification) "—with their fox-farm. Now can we do it?"

"Let's take a run over right away," suggested the chairman of The Dawn. "We have electric light everywhere, so I can show you our animals even after dark."

"A very good idea," Fyodor Fyodorovich promptly agreed. He had been wanting to visit The Dawn for a long time.

"All right," chimed in Zakhar Vasilievich. "Come along. Professor Lopatin will give us a true appraisal of your farm. Perhaps it isn't as fine as you paint it. It may not fit into our plans on the scale we've sketched them."

"I think it will, at least it will serve as a starting-point," said Sizov, a shade of uncertainty entering his voice.

"Then let's be off; if we wait till it starts raining, the foxes will hide in their kennels," urged Fyodor Fyodorovich. "And we can take a look at the lake on the way. Remember my mentioning otters? We might start breeding the animals almost at large. But we must take Zakhar Petrovich with us."

"He's busy. We'll speak to him later," Zakhar Vasilievich hastened to reply.

"Just as you say," acquiesced Fyodor Fyodorovich, guessing the Secretary's thoughts. "Can't be helped, Zakhar Petrovich," he said to himself. "Friendship's one thing, duty's another. The Secretary's right and you're wrong. I'm one of the conspirators planning to merge the fox-farms."

"Varya! Shura! Let's go!" he called out, making for the car.

But at this moment Fyodor Fyodorovich saw his pupil Varya Berezhkova in revolt for the first time.

"Fyodor Fyodorovich, have you forgotten the party to-night? The concert? The ball?"

"Have you forgotten?" echoed Shura.

Fyodor Fyodorovich burst into peals of loud laughter. The chairman of The Dawn had never expected so dignified a professor to give vent to such boisterous mirth.

"Quite right," said Fyodor Fyodorovich with a wag of his white beard. "We can't go to-day. We're going to a ball," he announced, turning suddenly grave and addressing Zakhar Vasilievich and Sizov: "But we'll pay The Dawn a visit within the next few days."

"The students will be dreadfully put out if Fyodor Fyodorovich doesn't come to-night," said Varya, by way of being polite.

"I understand," said the disappointed Zakhar Vasilievich.

Shuna ran to change her dress.

"Why don't you join us?" invited Fyodor Fyodorovich.

But Zakhar Vasilievich declined the invitation, saying he must make the trip to The Dawn. A glance exchanged between Zakhar Vasilievich and Sizov told Fyodor Fyodorovich that plans for a merged animal-breeding farm were well under way, and that soon his dreams of breeding foxes and other fur-bearing animals on a large scale would be realized.

"Let us drive you back," offered Zakhar Vasilievich.

But Varya, fearing that they might yet take Fyodor Fyodorovich to The Dawn, said under her breath:

"We haven't far to go and the road's bad for cars."

The chairman was exasperated:

"That little chit of a girl!" he muttered. "She's the one who wouldn't let him go; she hauled him away under our very noses!"

"The Komsomol is a force to be reckoned with, brother," said Zakhar Vasilievich, getting into the car. "As for the dig about the road—I'm afraid we deserve it."

Meanwhile the "little chit of a girl" was marching at the heels of Fyodor Fyodorovich, glancing back apprehensively now and then at the car, which was lunging over the ruts in the muddy road.

Fyodor Fyodorovich was so lost in dreams of a great new fox-farm that he did not notice the approach of Arkadi Korenev, who was on his way back from The Streams.

Fyodor Fyodorovich was roused from his dreams by the sound of an animated conversation. He was astonished when he saw to whom Varya was talking. What could she find to talk about with this young man who managed to hold himself so aloof from all his fellow-students?

It was precisely the qualities that Korenev lacked that Fyodor Fyodorovich most admired in Varya.

This girl, raised in a children's home, possessed what he considered the most essential of human attributes, the ability to share the joys and sorrows of others. It was inborn in her; she was not even aware that she possessed it.

With an easy grace she always sacrificed her personal interests to those of the group. These common interests were as essential to her as the air she breathed, and the meaning and purpose of them were identified with the welfare of each of her friends, and of the entire country.

All that Varya did was in accordance with the dictates of her conscience as a Komsomol member and was guided by the view she took of herself "from the outside". Fyodor Fyodorovich had noticed this long before; he appreciated it in her, and called it "one of the traits of the New Man". He had in mind the New Man of communist society, the creating of whom was the main task and final purpose of the Revolution.

Every year Fyodor Fyodorovich discovered more people of this calibre.

Many of the warping, oppressive feelings he had had to root out of himself, he and others—some of them the finest people of his generation—simply did not exist in Soviet young people. These feelings sprang from what had become mere terms for them: the power of money and private property, the inefficacy of talent and ability in a world ruled by money and private property, the oppression of man by man. Soviet young people were aware that such things still existed, but they could not understand the psychology of those who supported them or reconciled themselves to their existence.

Quite different thoughts and feelings had been nurtured in them and become as vital to them as the blood that flowed in their veins. And these thoughts and feel-

ings, like the flow of their blood, could be stopped only by death itself.

They had an unconquerable faith in the joy of labour, in the power of man and of friendship, and above everything else they had a proud love of their country.

Their love of country and faith in its strength and justice were unwavering, deeply personal feelings that eclipsed all others. More than anything on earth did they desire the progress and prosperity of their native land. And this was understandable, since their own happiness was linked up with the happiness of their country.

Two years before, Professor Lopatin had been a member of a delegation visiting the People's Democracies. This experience made him only more keenly conscious of the type of people Soviet power had developed in the course of 30 years. He went back in his mind to his youth, to those difficult years of storm and conflict when what had once seemed unshakable was being torn down, and what at times had seemed unattainable was being realized.

At home he had looked upon young people with the loving but exacting eye of an educator. Here he loved them even more, infected as he was by the wonder and admiration of people who, having just stepped out of the past, stood face to face with the future. The future already existed, and was holding out its hands to them, offering these emancipated millions its support. On returning from his trip, Lopatin had become even more friendly with his students, demanded more of them at examinations, and attended their Komsomol meetings more frequently. And yet his mind kept turning to those who had just begun life anew and were learning from Soviet people.

On that sad evening when Lopatin had been told of the desertion of Belevsky, he could not explain to

Chebrets and Gromada why he had been so crushed by the news. He knew that our people were quite capable of analyzing Belevsky's motives, of discovering what was hidden in his heart. But he felt compelled to answer for Belevsky's conduct to those others for whom the terms "Soviet student" and "Komsomol member" meant people who were irreproachable, people who served as their example.

His reflections were interrupted by Korenev's monotone.

"Most of them here are studying biology, as might be expected on a kolkhoz," he was saying. "But do you know what I discovered in the neighbouring village? A poetess. She's taking a correspondence course at the Literary Institute. What am I to do with her?"

"Speak to Yuna Dozhdikov," advised Varya. "He writes poetry and goes to evening sessions at the Literary Institute."

"I too thought of Dozhdikov, but first I decided to consult Lyuba, since she's the Komsomol Organizer. And Lyuba says Dozhdikov isn't to be depended on."

"Is she pretty, your poetess?" asked Varya shrewdly.

"How do I know?" asked Korenev.

Varya laughed.

"It doesn't matter. Lyuba would never let him strike up a friendship with a poetess! But have no fear, she'll take care of the matter herself."

"I'm glad of that," said Korenev with relief. "I really didn't know what to do." Without halting, he took off his glasses, wiped them, and put them on again. "I want to run over to this other kolkhoz," he said, turning into a side-path.

"What were you talking about?" asked Fyodor Fyodorovich when she caught him up.

In reply Varya told him the following story: Korenev had been appointed to a team that was to work with

kolkhoz members. At first he had objected. But after a talk with Orekhov, "his social-mindedness had awakened" (Varya cloaked the boundless admiration she felt for Nikita in official language). Now Korenev was working with kolkhoz members as conscientiously as anyone else on the team; and besides this he had introduced the idea of having kolkhoz correspondence students who were studying to become engineers, teachers, geologists and so on, keep in touch with regular students at the university and institutes in Moscow. It was while pursuing this purpose that he had unearthed the poetess. Varya laughed once more.

Fyodor Fyodorovich recalled how mechanically Korenev had taken off his glasses and wiped them. The boy was still scarcely more than a child, but he was so used to wearing glasses that they had almost become a part of him. Very sad. Fyodor Fyodorovich began to pity Korenev. And suddenly he realized that he was less sorry for Korenev than ashamed of himself. How could he have been so mistaken in the lad? Korenev had the same virtues as Varya, though in Varya they had asserted themselves sooner. The same seeds were implanted, they were giving off shoots and were sure to mature. They only had to be carefully cultivated and kept free of weeds.

When Varya and Fyodor Fyodorovich reached the biological station, the concert was in full swing. Lyuba rushed up to Varya and dragged her away to dress. Fyodor Fyodorovich became the centre of a crowd of students near the improvised platform set up among the birches. A few minutes later Marina and Varya appeared on the stage. Varya was wearing a long dress, open at the throat, which made her neck seem more slender than ever. She looked very comical with those absurd curls on her forehead. But as soon as she began to sing there was

nothing comical about her. She was lovely. Her voice was pure and strong, and it was hard to believe that it was the frail, quiet little Varya who was singing.

A few drops of rain fell. They were followed by a downpour. Varya and Marina took cover under the nearest birch-tree and kept on singing. Their voices interwove and soared higher and higher, like two larks in the spring.

No one stirred in the audience.

The rain did not stop, but the programme was not interrupted.

The ball, too, was held. The girls pulled rain-coats over their shoulders—red, green and blue—and the meagre light of the lanterns picked out spots of colour as the wet coats went round and round among the birches.

CHAPTER 21

During the ball, Nikita, clad in his mackintosh, sat on the veranda of the dining-room and watched the dances. Alla came up to him.

"Hullo, Nikita," she said.

"Hullo, Alla."

"Why don't you ask me to sit down?"

"Do."

After having waited in vain for Nikita at the chaff-chaff's tree, Alla had passed the first sleepless night of her life. What could have happened? Why hadn't he come? Faithful, obedient, adoring Nikita, who had implored her to marry him! She no longer found this amusing.

When Nikita was among Alla's guests, she would sometimes feel ashamed of his shabby suit, and of his brusque, straightforward manner of retorting to her

friends' witticisms. She gave them to understand that she was fond of Nikita, but did not take him seriously. He, of course, was unaware of this, but once he had said to her: "Never invite me when you have guests."

Nikita loved to tell her about Chuvashia. Her father might have enjoyed this, but she found it boring. Nikita told her they had had no electricity until recently, when the power station was built. How dreary it must have been without electricity—so dark and quiet! Nikita assured her it wasn't. But then he wasn't like other people. He listened attentively to music and was deeply moved by it, but his remarks were not the accepted sort. "Hear that stream rushing along, Alla?" he would say, or "That's about a person who is all alone." On the whole this was amusing, but Alla was afraid someone might overhear him. Once when they were in the Tretyakov Gallery she had been embarrassed by having him tug at her sleeve and say: "Look! Isn't this splendid?" as if he had discovered something extraordinary. And it was merely a Levitan—a wood, a stream with a little bridge over it—nothing special, and everybody knew the picture. But how he listened when Alla talked! Almost reverently. She loved to have people listen to her reverently. She was used to being paid special attention. And she liked it. Sometimes, it was true, Nikita dared to disagree with her.

Recollections which had once seemed amusing, were now very dear and essential, and were dominated by the single thought: "Nikita didn't come"! She had wanted him to come. Something must have happened. He had changed his mind. Nikita was handsome and clever and talented. Why hadn't he come? Why? Mere chance? Fyodor Fyodorovich must have detained him. Or had he changed his mind about wanting to marry her?

She recalled Varya stirring in her sleep that night. Why had Varya flown off the handle? Alla had not said

anything wrong—had just sought the advice of her friends. It was just that Varya had no beaux. Yet she would be pretty if she were dressed properly.

Nikita! Great, big, dependable Nikita! And suddenly Alla realized very definitely that she loved him and wanted to marry him—that she could be very happy with him. He would make life interesting. She recalled how trusting his eyes looked as he kissed her. And the little twitch to his lips. "I want you to be always smiling," he had written. It was then that Alla had lighted the torch, taken the letter from under her pillow, and re-read it. The words were as sincere as a child's gaze, as warming as a ray of sunlight. "Your father gave his consent." Evidently Nikita had written to her father. Her father would like Nikita. Indeed he would; there could be no question about that.

"I want you to be always..." Oh no, it was all a mistake—a misunderstanding. Everything would come out all right. She would do anything he wanted her to. Never again would she be late when it was her turn to be on duty, and she would give more time to her studies. Once he had said to her: "I'm sure your eye-lashes are silky and you've made them sticky." Very well, she wouldn't touch up her eye-lashes any more. She would be just like all the other girls, so that they wouldn't envy her and Nikita would be pleased. To-morrow evening she would meet him at the *chiff-chaff*'s tree—and he would say: "What wonderful eyes you have, and how silky your lashes are!" She was in love with Nikita. That was it. She would marry him. He would grow used to life in Moscow—would learn to make witty remarks and to dance—in a word, would cease being a bumpkin. In the summer she might even go with him to visit his father in Chuvashia. Why not? She would make herself a pretty dress with no back to it, bask in the sun, and go swim-

ming. She and Nikita would take walks in the woods. And he would talk on and on—buzz-buzz. He had such a deep voice—buzz-buzz. Dear old Nikita!

Alla was only too glad to go on thinking about Nikita till morning, recalling everything he had ever said to her and every occasion on which he had smiled at her. Suddenly she realized that up to then she had given more attention to other people's opinion of Nikita than to Nikita himself.

And her own opinion? Why was she so attracted to him? Why did she always long to see him? Why, when she had been with him, did she invariably feel wiser, better, more capable? Was it not because Nikita believed that she was like that, and loved her as he saw her, an Alla of his own creating, who bore little resemblance to the real Alla? And he loved her so deeply that when she was with him she could not help trying to be like *his* Alla.

Why had he called her "Sasha" on the previous day? A name that sounded as soft and warm as a fur mitten. Sasha Irtishova. The girl he loved, who was not at all like Alla.

Why were there so many other voices, so many other words droning in her ear, when his was the only voice and his the only words she wished to hear? For the first time in her life Alla felt frightened and unhappy. But she had confidence in herself, in the power she wielded over Nikita, and in his love.

On the following day, Nikita did not seek her out. That evening she went to him and asked what had happened.

"Nothing," replied Nikita, avoiding her eyes. "I just thought things over and came to the conclusion that you didn't love me. You and I are too different, Alla."

He spoke like a person who had been out in the cold for a long time, so chilled that he could hardly move

his lips. Too different? They had always been different, yet he had fallen in love with her.

"Have you stopped loving me?" she asked softly.

"Not yet, but I will."

His mouth was hard and his eyes haggard. He turned and went away. And now, at the ball, Alia went to him again and sat down beside him. She must speak to him. She was sure that if she could just speak to him, everything would be as it had been.

"I have a favour to ask of you, Nikita."

"What is it?" he asked politely, staring straight ahead.

"I am going to town to-morrow, and they're not sending the car for me."

"No, they won't send the car for you," said Nikita, very sure of this for some reason.

"I brought a lot of books for the girls, and to-morrow I must take them back with me. They're very heavy. Would you help me carry my bag to the station? In Moscow I won't have to put you to the trouble; I can take a taxi."

"Very well," said Nikita. "I'll help you take the books to the station."

All that evening Nikita kept hearing her laugh. She had a ringing, carefree laugh. He saw her dancing in her brightly coloured rain-coat, and heard her singing with the others. Her heart was light as a feather. It was a long way to the station—all of 20 kilometres, they said. She and Nikita would talk on the way. She would only put two or three books in the bag—why should Nikita have to carry such a weight? It would tire him out, so that he wouldn't be able to listen to her attentively. And she must have all his attention. She would forget to take her rain-coat, and Nikita would put his enormous green mackintosh round her shoulders. And when they walked through the woods he would look into her eyes as he

used to—trusting, appealingly, and tenderly. Everything would turn out all right. Alla sang so loudly that her voice could be heard above all the others. She sang and laughed at the same time. Nikita got up and went down to the river.

He had hoped to be alone, but he found more people there than on the dance-floor. From beneath a willow-tree that drooped over the water came the sound of two girlish voices. They belonged to Marina and Varya, who had sought protection from the rain, now a drizzle. They were in such good voice this evening that they could not stop singing, and here, by the waterside, their voices sounded particularly clear and beautiful. Nikita came to a halt, listened, and glanced about, adjusting his eyes to the darkness. Then he walked on. Marina and Varya finished singing "In the valley vast, receding...."

"Did you know that song was composed by a professor of Moscow University?" asked Marina in a whisper. "And I heard another interesting thing the other day: there's a window-sill in the anthropological museum on which Lermontov used to sit and write poetry. When we get to town I'll show it to you. Used to sit there and write—just think! Lermontov!"

"You must show Yura that window," laughed Varya. "Perhaps it will help him get inspiration."

"He's a lazy wind-bag."

"Ivan Ostapovich says the only trouble with him is that he's young; give him time and he'll grow up. And he says I'm just a kid. He didn't say anything about you."

"Ivan Ostapovich's gone back to town again," whispered Marina somewhat irrelevantly.

"Yes, he went yesterday," added Varya, also in a whisper. It seemed wrong to speak above a whisper in such eerie surroundings—nothing but black water and black foliage everywhere.

"Yesterday? I thought it was two days ago."

"No, yesterday." Varya grew silent, and so did Marina.

Hush, dears, make no sound. Sit quietly, waiting for happiness to come to you. As yet you know nothing but watchful waiting. And dread. What if it should never come? The flame is so tiny and flickering. Silence! How easy to extinguish it with some thoughtless, hasty word! Silence!

Both of you are proud. It can't be helped. Go on in the same way. From glance to glance. From smile to smile. From one chance meeting to the next. And in the meantime tremble, blush, pucker your brows in a frown—and keep silent. It can't be helped. Both of you are proud.

The rain stopped, but probably not for long, for the sky remained overcast. The smell of wet grass grew stronger. Water dripped off the trees, and that was the only thing that broke the stillness.

Nikita all but stumbled upon Yuna and Lyuba, who were sauntering along, noticing nothing. Beside Yura, Lyuba looked smaller than ever, very quiet, not a bit like herself. Nikita turned round in vexation and made for the boys' quarters.

Just as he had thought! Yuna enjoying himself, while the fledglings went hungry. Nikita rushed up to them—they were all alive. It was a sheer miracle they had not been eaten by some cat. Nikita set about feeding them. Suddenly Yura burst into the room.

"Feeding them? Thanks. I have no more cigarettes."

"Your fledglings are hungry," said Nikita angrily. Somehow he found Yura particularly irritating to-day. "You shouldn't have undertaken to look after them. You start important work like this, and—"

Yura snorted.

"What more do you want of me, I should like to know! It's the first time I've been out for a fortnight. I measure and weigh and draw all day long. Vera Vasil-

ievna has set me a hundred tasks. The feeding's not so bad, but nobody could stand all this incessant counting of milligrammes and millimetres. And what's the use of it, I should like to know?"

Nikita laughed. It was a nasty laugh, aimed to make it impossible for Yura to go away again. He'd had his walk, and let that do!

"Are you aware that we are experimenting on the transference of birds?"

"Well?" asked Yura, with a sigh of sheer weariness.

"Well, then, your work is important. We are going to transfer the fledglings. You ought to understand how important it is for us to know what care a fledgling needs and how it should develop normally. Your work is part of our plan. You have been put down for a report. You are being given a chance to stand on your own feet, and you don't take advantage of it. We'll take away the fledglings, if you're not careful. There are plenty who'd be glad to look after them."

Yura said nothing. The words seemed to have gone home.

Nikita softened.

"You won't have to go on much longer, they're getting quite big."

"They can fly," interrupted Yura happily. "Just look!"

He rushed up to the cage to which the fledglings had been transferred, took one of them out, and cautiously dropped it over a bed. The bird flapped its wings courageously, but instantly settled, exhausted, on Yura's hand. But it was extremely pleased with itself, looking proudly at Nikita, and industriously pecking at an invisible speck on Yura's hand. Nikita offered it a grasshopper. The bird made as if to peck at it, but checked itself in good time—why take the trouble to peck? Half closing its eyes, the fledgling opened its beak to its full extent, as if inviting the grasshopper to drop in.

"Spoilt little beggar!" laughed Nikita. "A grown-up bird and expects to be fed like a fledgling! When did you last weigh them?"

"Yesterday." Yura thrust the bird back into the cage and slipped out of the room.

Now thoroughly annoyed, Nikita tugged at the drawer in which the scales and weights were kept, but it was locked. Nikita lay down on the bed, his hands behind his head. He was disappointed that his threat had had so little effect.

Rushed off to make love again. Happy fellow, Yura! Everything is simple and easy for him. Was it, perhaps, because so far he had never really loved?

The door squeaked.

"Go in, go in!"

The voice was Yuna's.

Nikita did not so much as raise his head—he had no desire to talk.

"He is asleep," whispered Lyuba.

"You mustn't be offended," Yura was saying. "Fancy, I'm to make a report to the zoology circle! The brigade can't go on with its experiments in bird-transference without this work. I'll weigh them, and you write down the results. Only be sure not to make any mistakes. Shall we?"

"All right," whispered Lyuba submissively.

Nikita never knew when he began to doze to the accompaniment of their friendly whispering, and when he woke up Lyuba had gone, and the room was full of a noisy crowd of students, hoarse from singing and laughing.

When nearly everyone was asleep, a dark figure stole noiselessly to Lopatin's window, avoiding the light.

Fyodor Fyodorovich was writing. His hand flew over

the paper, trying to keep up with the swift rush of his thoughts. Very beautiful was Professor Lopatin's face at such moments.

Gromada withdrew. "I'll tell him later, no point in it now," he resolved on seeing that face.

"Who's there?" Fyodor Fyodorovich got up, leaned out of the window, and peered into the darkness.

"It's me," replied Gromada reluctantly.

"So you've returned? Do come in, Ivan Ostapovich, I want to read you one of the chapters from my work on the acclimatization of sables. Do you mind listening? But what's the matter? You're not looking yourself at all."

"I have bad news. I seem to be always bringing you bad news."

"Bad news?" repeated Lopatin dully.

"Absurd, preposterous news."

"Tell me." Lopatin sank into a chair.

After a moment's hesitation, Gromada said:

"You've been dismissed, Fyodor Fyodorovich."

"What?"

Gromada recalled the solidity of the silence, with the wind shrieking through it, when he had made his first panachute jump seven years earlier. It was like that now.

"Don't let it worry you," he heard Lopatin saying at last.

Gromada's breath came back to him.

"I'm not worried," he said bravely. "What would you say to me if I dared to worry? You would say: 'Look here, Ivan, what did I take you on as a pupil for? So that you should doubt my strength?'"

"When did it happen?" asked Lopatin.

"To-day. And it has already been announced that applications to fill your Chair will be considered."

"What charges have been brought against me?"

"Many. A whole host of them," said Gromada with a bitter little laugh. "First of all, it seems you created an

unwholesome atmosphere in the faculty. Scientists should stand together, and you sowed dissension among them. Secondly, you slandered and persecuted outstanding scientists."

"Like Shumsky, I suppose?"

"He's one of them. Thirdly, your Chair devoted itself to petty practical problems, at the expense of fundamental research."

"Is that all?"

"No—wait, let me think. Oh yes, in your lectures you distorted Darwin's teachings."

"In other words, I'm in the way." Lopatin's voice had regained its force, was calm and almost jovial. No, mocking.

"Indeed you *are* in the way," said Gromada, relieved. "Very much so."

"I'm very glad they find me so much in the way, aren't you, Ivan Ostapovich?"

"I am. And even I am in their way—nothing to be compared with you, of course," boasted Gromada.

"And what have they done to you?"

"Given me a public reprimand. A severe one. With a warning that I must mend my ways."

"And how have *your* crimes been catalogued?"

In a stony voice, without pause or intonation, Gromada recited the charge he had conscientiously committed to memory:

"Comrade Gromada has taken advantage of his position as Secretary of the second-year students' Party organization to misguide the student body, and has, by misdirecting the discussion following a certain report, brought discredit upon the most outstanding theories and achievements of the science of genetics. So that's the sort of fellow I am!" he concluded.

"Didn't appreciate their fruit-flies, eh?"

"I'm afraid I didn't." Both men laughed. At a later

date they would have doubted anyone who told them they had laughed that night.

"And what about Chebrets?" asked Lopatin.

"The order for his dismissal has been drawn up, too. I saw it myself."

"So we've been rounded up."

"It's more difficult to get rid of Chebrets," said Gromada. "He's Secretary of the Party Bureau of the faculty, so it requires the consent of the District Party Committee. They won't give him up so easily."

"The District Party Committee," said Fyodor Fyodorovich. "That's where you and I will begin, Ivan Ostapovich. They won't give us up either. And the Party Committee at the university will help us." Lopatin was perfectly serene now. "Have something to eat and go to bed. To-morrow we'll go to town."

After a moment's pause, Gromada came closer to Lopatin.

"I'm certain everything will turn out all right in the end, Fyodor Fyodorovich. I know it will. But now it is August. We have to choose our new students. Soon the new term will begin. How can we do without you? How can the university get along without you?"

"I don't want the university to get along without me," said Lopatin simply. "I'm too fond of it. Taken root in it. Can't live without it, understand, Ivan? Can't and don't intend to. Remember that. Now go to bed."

By way of showing that he was in earnest, Lopatin turned out the light. They both lay down in their clothes, as if they were in a railway station waiting for a train. Gromada stretched himself out on the floor on a sheepskin coat and Lopatin, after prolonged and vain remonstrances, lay down on the bed. They kept very still. Each hoped the other would go to sleep.

Gromada listened to the old man's breathing. Apparently he was all right. Everything was so quiet that it

seemed to Gromada he could hear the beating of Lopatin's heart. Wasn't it beating too rapidly and too loud? But the next minute he realized that it was his own heart that was beating too rapidly and too loud. It was only in such still, tense moments that Gromada realized to the full how much he loved this man, and how he dreaded seeing any sign of age in him. In the darkness he visualized more distinctly than ever Lopatin's great, knotted, skilful hands, the kind wrinkles beneath his eyes, the smile that was the least bit tired. Gromada lay there silent, thinking, afraid to wake up his companion. Invaluable man! Wonderful man, who thought so little of himself and so much of others; a man who wanted nothing for himself but a humble bed and his books, but who wanted everything for his country. He was always thinking of some new scheme for its improvement. Only the other day he had been talking about fertilizing fir-trees. Fir-trees only bear cones once in about five or seven years. In those years the woods flourish—are full of squirrels and grouse, not to mention mice and the creatures that live on mice. In a word, the woods come to life. In the intervening years there's a lull. You, Nikolai Alexandrovich Sharov, call this the "law of averages", but Lopatin refuses to accept this law. He believes that if fir-trees were fertilized, say from the air, they would bear cones more frequently. And if they did, your law of averages would be blown to smithereens. One day Lopatin had said to Gromada confidentially: "I tried it myself—fertilized ten fir-trees here at the biological station." And he had taken Gromada to see them. They were simply covered with cones. No comparison with the other trees. And what would they be like the next year?

Suddenly Gromada heard measured breathing. Lopatin had fallen asleep. If somebody had told him to-day

that the fir-trees were a failure, or the Barguzin sable could not be acclimatized in the Urals, he would probably have been unable to sleep. And now he was asleep. Why should he worry about himself, when the whole of him, his thoughts, his great, radiant soul, was one with his native land?

Quick, light steps were heard, coming uncertainly to a stop outside the door.

"Who's there?" cried Lopatin, waking instantly and sitting up in bed.

"It's me!" said somebody in a gasping whisper.

Gromada opened the door and switched on the light. In the doorway stood Vera Vasilievna, a shawl over her head. Wild-eyed, speechless. She was afraid once she spoke she would be unable to restrain her tears. And she was too true a pupil of Lopatin's to allow herself to cry. She knew he couldn't stand that.

"What's the matter, Verochka?" asked Lopatin, holding out his hand to her.

She stepped over Gromada's legs and sat down on the side of the bed. She tried to speak. Then she could control herself no longer, and putting her head down on Lopatin's shoulder, she wept. Anguished, helpless tears, such as are shed only by very brave people, who seldom weep.

"I've just come from the post-office.... I went to ring up home... and my husband told me some of our students had been to him and told him that the faculty had..."

Angry with herself, she kept wiping away her tears with her fists, and with her plait, which had escaped from beneath the shawl. The plait was already quite wet.

Gromada caught himself thinking that Lopatin could not have shown more dismay if he had suddenly met a tiger face to face.

"Verochka, come, come, Verochka! Why, you never cried, even when you were a student!" he murmured. Then he vigorously seized the towel hanging on the bed behind him, and began wiping her face with it.

Vera Vasilievna pulled herself together with an effort.

"I shall leave. We'll all leave. As if we could go on working in that hornet's nest without you! Fly's nest!" she corrected herself angrily.

"Calm yourself, Vera!" said Lopatin severely. He feared intensely another outburst of tears. But Vera Vasilievna was not crying any more.

"So I am to go!" he added. "How can I go away from such pupils, such friends, from the university in my old age?" He stroked her head soothingly. "You're just the same as you were in your first year—haven't changed a bit!"

"I didn't cry then," said Vera Vasilievna, trying to smile, and almost succeeding. "Professor Sharov's leaving, too, Fyodor Fyodorovich!" Gromada shook his head sceptically, and Vera Vasilievna suddenly fell upon him. "Why would you pass judgement on him when you've only known him two years? He's the decentest man in the world! And what a scientist! Isn't he, Fyodor Fyodorovich? You're not in a position to judge him, Gromada. Sharov got in with Shumsky just because he wasn't careful. He admires people with knowledge, and Shumsky knows a lot. He's read everything and knows four languages. And that's what drew Sharov to him. You still don't understand, Gromada—the less one knows a person, the more careful one should be in judging him. I'm right about Sharov, aren't I, Fyodor Fyodorovich?" And again she cast a glance so youthful and trustful at Lopatin that Gromada could hardly believe she was the same Vera Vasilievna of whom the whole faculty stood in awe.

In a voice that was half-scolding, wholly tranquil, Lopatin said:

"You'd better get us something we can eat on the way, Verochka. We're going to town in the morning." And Gromada read in his eyes that what Vera Vasilievna had just said about Sharov was the very thing Lopatin had needed to hear.

Pulling at his pipe, Lopatin watched Vera Vasilievna restore order to his bachelor quarters. In a few minutes the table was covered with a clean runner, an omelette was hissing on the electric stove, the dust had disappeared in some incomprehensible fashion and books stood in their proper places.

"Marvellous!" he said.

"What?" asked Vera Vasilievna, glancing at him over her shoulder.

"Your talent for making places cosy. You do it in five minutes, on any expedition. You radiate warmth as if you were a magic stove."

"And do you know how far you shed warmth?" laughed Vera Vasilievna. "Oh, you have no idea! Sit down and have some food."

As they were going out of the house, Lopatin halted for a moment and took Vera Vasilievna by the hand, as if to make up for the severity of his voice:

"Listen to me, Vera—if there's a short period without me, don't go away. Understand? Nobody's to go away. It's not a matter of showing character, it's a matter of saving the faculty. Understand? And Sharov won't go. That's all. We won't wake him. I'll write a note, and tomorrow you'll tell him everything. Now go and get some sleep."

Vera Vasilievna looked once again at Lopatin and then started running down the path like a little girl, her plaits striking against her back.

"Gone off to have another cry," summed up Gromada.

"Good girl, that," said Lopatin, not quite logically.

Lopatin flung a short note describing what had happened through the slightly open window of Sharov's warm, quiet, snug room. It was still dark and drizzling when they passed through the gate of the biological station and turned silently into the road.

Nikita called for Alla at the exact time agreed upon. He picked up her bag and said: "Don't forget your rain-coat. It's raining hard." Without a word they walked to the gate. It didn't matter that they said nothing. They still had 20 kilometres to go. Alla walked quickly so that no one should overtake them.

At the gate stood a shiny black motor car. It was waiting for Alla. Her mother opened the door and said: "Hurry up, darling, or you'll get wet."

"I'm not going by car, Mother," cried the despairing Alla. "I'm going to walk, like the others. Please, Mother!"

Nikita stood next to the car holding the bag and saying nothing.

"Are you crazy, Alla? You'll get wet through. Tell her she mustn't, Nikita."

"Climb in, Alla," said Nikita with reserve. "You're sure to catch cold; you're not used to being exposed."

"I won't!" insisted Alla.

"Alla, do you want me to have a heart attack?"

"Get in, Alla Alexandrovna," said the chauffeur sharply. "You've got me in trouble with Alexander Semyonovich as it is. He told me I mustn't call for you under any circumstances, but Klavdia Nikolayevna persuaded me to. I gave in on account of the rain. Alexander Semyonovich gets back from Leningrad to-day, and he's sure to find out. Get in there, now!"



Reluctantly Alla reached for the door-handle.

"Will you go with us, Nikita? At least to the station?"

"No, thank you," said Nikita politely. "I'm hale and hearty," and he thrust the bag on to the seat next to the chauffeur.

The door banged shut. Slowly the car moved off, guided cautiously over the bad road. Alla kneeled on the seat and pressed her face against the window. Large drops were streaming steadily down the glass.

"What a downpour!" exclaimed her mother.

Through the tear-stained window Alla saw Varya pass through the gate of the biological station. Varya was alone and was walking slowly, with lowered head, carrying a little brief-case in her hand. Nikita looked round and waited for her to catch up with him. He took the brief-case out of her hand and said something to her. Probably he said that her coat wasn't rain-proof, for she saw him touch it and then share his own enormous mackintosh with her.

When the car reached the highway, it picked up speed. The wind whistled and the rain whipped past the windows. Alla could not see Nikita and Varya any more....

Nikita and Varya walked along unhurriedly. It was slightly warmer under the mackintosh. And there was the screen of rain before her eyes. Nikita took Varya's arm. With his free hand he held her brief-case and one side of the mackintosh. Varya held the other side, securing it against the attacks of the wind. Timidly she glanced up at Nikita's stern profile.

"Keep under the mackintosh," he said. "Yours is no good. You're so thin, I'm afraid you'll catch cold."

The rain came down in torrents. And they had 20 kilometres to go.

CHAPTER 22

No sooner had the fox-cubs thrown themselves on the vole brought them by their mother than Nikita descended like a buzzard and snatched it out of their paws. Lifting their tails in fright, two of the cubs instantly took to their hole, while the third, the largest and boldest—Varya's favourite—ran off to one side, crouched with its fore-paws outstretched, its scrawny little back arched, waved its tail and sputtered angrily at Nikita. But Nikita calmly placed the dead vole on a stump and began to sketch it. This was too much for Varya.

"How could you do such a thing! They're hungry, and you——"

Varya's vehement outburst was very much like the sputtering of the cub, which was now circling about the clearing, nose to the ground, on the trail of that nice-smelling meal.

Nikita did not so much as flicker an eye-lash. Taking his time, he gave an artistic rendering of the vole's back, then turned it over to draw its stomach. Varya stood helplessly by watching him.

"He's a rare creature, this vole," explained Nikita as he leisurely shaded in a paw. "Rarely to be met with in these parts."

Nikita slit open his victim, put its stomach in a bottle of alcohol, and handed Varya the mutilated remains.

"Here, give it back to them. They don't know me."

Varya placed the vole at the very entrance to the hole. Almost immediately a sharp little face with a twitching nose appeared, but it soon vanished without taking the vole.

"I knew that would happen," said the vexed Varya. "It's spoiled. They won't touch it now. It hasn't the right smell."

"What does it smell of? Nothing special," said Nikita,

with a somewhat guilty glance at Varya. He had not meant things to turn out this way.

"What does it smell of? Of your scalpel of course, and of your hands."

Meanwhile the vole had slid down the hole, evidently pulled in by a paw. And soon thereafter the little foxes appeared in the clearing licking their chops. Nikita gave a sigh of relief.

This took place at the hole in which the foxes and badgers lived together. The fox- and badger-cubs were quite big now, but they had not become enemies, as Varya had feared; on the contrary, they were the best of friends. In view of this friendship, their mothers too tried to maintain amicable relations. They would sit impressively, one on either side of the hole, keeping watch over their children.

Mother Fox never so much as looked at Mother Badger. Lean and narrow, with a tired-looking face, she would half-close her eyes and gaze contentedly at her nimble babes.

Mother Badger was more well-disposed and peace-loving. Easily forgiving whatever injuries she received at the hands of her neighbour, she sat there gazing sleepily at Mother Fox and the little foxes and her own children, whom she liked exceedingly. They were round, with rolls of fat on their necks, and they were all overgrown with bristles, with pink skin showing underneath. They tumbled about merrily, poked the little foxes with their pig-like snouts, and defended themselves as best they could. The little foxes were graceful and agile and had long slender legs. They would attack their clumsy friends from all sides, snapping at them, teasing them, pulling them about, but they could not make the badgers lose their temper.

Varya would gladly have visited such delightful creatures every day, had time allowed. She had found another hole, unknown even to Fyodor Fyodorovich, where there were some new-born fox-cubs. Varya had

been feeding them ever since she found them. They grew used to her and let her examine them, sketch them, and study their teeth development. Every other day she weighed them.

As she and Nikita had walked to the station on the preceding Sunday, she had told him about the fox-cubs, and now he helped her with them. He carried the scales, which were large and clumsy and had to be transported some four kilometres to the farthest hole. Varya had not asked him to do this; he had volunteered. He had also found her a new rain-coat and a pair of rubber boots. The boots were many sizes too large and behaved in a very independent manner, insisting on turning off to one side when Varya wished to go straight ahead.

Nikita helped weigh the cubs, who for some reason refused to lie quietly in the scale-pan. They would squirm and slip away. Laughingly Nikita and Varya would catch them and put them back.

It was on their way back from weighing the new-born cubs that Varya and Nikita had decided to pay a visit to the fox-and-badger hole on the day of the vole-incident. The weather was so fine they did not wish to go home. The rain had stopped and everything was particularly fresh and pure and fragrant.

When they had left in the morning, the grass had been wet and the ground cold. Now the earth was warm and the grass dry, and Varya took off her boots and stepped lightly over the ground with her little bare feet.

Suddenly her eyes darkened. She halted, taut as a string that would sound at the slightest touch.

Belevsky was passing them, wearing a very smart new suit and a bow-tie.

Varya rushed over and stood in front of him. It seemed to Nikita that she flew the distance separating them. It was a wide road on which they met; during the war hundreds of tanks had passed over it. Varya was very slight,

but she seemed to fill that whole wide road. There was no avoiding her, no going round her or pushing her aside.

"Where are you going?" she asked sternly.

Belevsky had the effrontery to smile. Didn't he understand?

"To the biological station."

"What for?"

Belevsky shrugged his shoulders.

"I want to see Lopatin," he said.

"Why?"

This time Belevsky both smiled and shrugged his shoulders and made an attempt to pass.

"I'm on duty to-day," she said sharply, but without losing her equanimity.

Belevsky laughed, and the laugh made Nikita frown. He disliked hearing people laugh when they had no desire to.

"Professor Lopatin is not at the biological station." The voice had a metallic ring to it (she usually called her professor Fyodor Fyodorovich). "And if by any chance he has returned, you are not to disturb him."

Nikita was reminded of the latch on the door of his father's house—if he chanced to come home late, it was very hard to lift it—the hoar-covered metal bar was freezing cold and burned his fingers. It was hard to lift the latch and get into the warmth of his own home, and if the latch could speak, Nikita did not doubt its voice would sound exactly like the one which had just said: "I will not let you in."

The discomfiture of the young man caused the smart suit to wrinkle and the shoulders to droop. And against the background of the bright green foliage, the yellow dots on his bow-tie faded and crawled past Nikita like insects.

Belevsky sank down on the ground at the side of the road. He could not understand what had happened. Why

had he given in? Varya and Nikita had long since disappeared. Marina had passed him by without so much as frowning at him. With an air of utter indifference she had walked past him in her proud beauty.

Belevsky knew that those he saw strolling past, chatting together, or lost in thought, were the best students. The summer's work was drawing to a close. These students had already passed their exams and completed their assignments, while the lazier ones were still drawing maps, sitting up nights to memorize the names of herbs and flowers, and writing up the fifty-day diary whose entries should have been made every day.

Past him walked the best of the rank and file. His comrades. People he had forgotten about.

Belevsky had made great effort to become friends with the professors, to get along with the dean, to be on good terms with the Komsomol Organizer. He saw nothing wrong in this. He worked hard and wanted to be sure no one would stand in the way of his progress. Later he had decided that Lopatin would be unable to offer him the necessary support, and would even spoil his future. He had only one life to live. He was in a hurry. And so he simply forgot about those people, his comrades. And now they were standing like a wall between him and his future. They did not trust him. They walked right past him, one after another, along this road he himself had covered scores of times. He had not been away long. Only a few days earlier Nikita had rushed up to him, told him all the latest news and listened to him respectfully, as to an elder. And Varya had regarded him with trustful curiosity. Marina had met him gravely, with drawn brows, and had told him all about the fledglings: He had been here, among his comrades, and Fyodor Fyodorovich had given him an interesting assignment. Belevsky suddenly remembered that on leaving the biological station he had forgotten to leave the maps showing

the location of the nests. Had the students been obliged to do this work all over again?

On catching sight of Belevsky, Nikita's first thought was of these maps, and he wanted to ask Belevsky what he had done with them. But then he remembered that he and Gromada had re-established the location of the nests and Marina had drawn maps that were even better than the first ones.

The work of the team was proceeding famously. Nikita carried on his work with Sharov, at the same time helping Marina with her fledglings. Only a few days before Nikita and Gromada had performed an interesting new experiment. Varya would be interested in hearing about it.

"You should hear what Ivan and I did!" he said, turning to her. "One night, when the birds were all asleep, we took a log with a nest in it, covered the hole, and carried it off—seven kilometres away."

"Whose nest?"

"A spotted fly-catcher's."

"Really?" Varya halted in astonishment.

"And what do you think happened? The father returned to the old spot but the mother stayed on. You can imagine how worried we were. Every time I went to look I was sure I'd find the fledglings dead and the mother gone. It seemed such a pity. But nothing of the sort. The fledglings are well and happy and growing up. Their mother is taking the best of care of them, but their father is back on the old spot."

"How can you tell the difference? It isn't easy with fly-catchers."

"We painted one of his wing-feathers white."

"In other words, you've proved that a nest can be transplanted?"

"It can, Varya. So far, of course, this is just one instance, but you know that Sharov, Korenev, Lyuba, and

some others thought it couldn't be done at all. And it can, you see. I don't know why they were so sure. Now it looks as if we could transfer nests of the most valuable forest birds by plane to our new forests. If only Fyodor Fyodorovich would hurry back! I've just got to tell him."

Nikita stopped short. He realized he had waxed too emotional and was talking less about facts than feelings. He shot an embarrassed sidelong glance at Varya, but she only said:

"I know. It's awfully hard to be without Fyodor Fyodorovich. I too have some news I want to tell him. It's been four days since he left, and still no sign of him. And if Belevsky has come here to find him, he can't be at the university."

"I hope he isn't ill," said Nikita anxiously, secretly resolving to go to Moscow that evening and find out what had happened to Lopatin. Things couldn't go on like this—without seeing him for so long, and without even knowing where he was.

Varya, too, grew silent and anxious. Only the other day she had asked Gromada if he knew what had happened to Fyodor Fyodorovich, and had received a vague answer—something about there being no cause for worry, Fyodor Fyodorovich had gone to Moscow on business. But for some reason Varya was uneasy.

She and Nikita walked on in very low spirits.

"Nikita! Varya! Wait a minute!"

Down the road leading from the station came Katya and Stepan. They were flushed and excited and almost running.

"I told you so!" cried Stepan, waving a newspaper.
"I told you so!"

"So did I!" exclaimed Katya. "We may not know much about science yet, but we've been through the war! We

know what's important and what's not! Shumsky and his fruit-flies—ugh!"

"Didn't he give it to Shumsky for those flies of his, just! That's what I call plain speaking. No beating round the bush."

They were both talking at once, interrupting each other, laying siege to Varya and Nikita.

"What in the world are you trying to tell us?" asked the perplexed Nikita.

"Here's what!" and Stepan held out the newspaper. It was the issue of *Pravda* carrying Lysenko's report.

By the time they reached the biological station, a crowd had gathered outside the dining-room. The students were talking and arguing, snatching the paper out of each other's hands. At first it was impossible to make head or tail of what was going on.

"So that's why he came running back!" said Nikita suddenly, and his frowning face seemed out of place among the general rejoicing.

"Who do you mean?" asked Stepan in surprise.

"Belevsky. He came back to look up Fyodor Fyodorovich. He's worse than I thought. I supposed he had realized his mistake and was ashamed."

"Forget him," said Stepan. "He's not important. The important thing is that the matter is settled. They won't be forcing those flies down our throats any more! Here's what I wanted to say, Comrades." Stepan raised his voice, and everyone stopped talking and sat down, some on the grass, others on the steps leading to the dining-room. "What I wanted to say is that we should be very happy about what has happened. I was raised in the taiga, and always thought the taiga was the most beautiful place on earth—such vast, dense forest, swarming with wild life. But its beauty is stern, its climate harsh, its blizzards fierce. Once I met a man who dreamed of planting an orchard. The old people laughed at him. 'How can

fruit-trees grow in such a climate?' they said. 'Eat your fill of cedar-nuts and be thankful for them.' But I said to him, though I was only a child at the time: 'Let's try.' We planted seven apple-trees: six of them froze to death, and one survived. Spring came, and there was our apple-tree in bloom! It wasn't particularly beautiful—not when compared with the trees I've seen. A little tree—three branches in all, but they were covered with white bloom. I stood gazing at it, unable to tear my eyes away. An apple-tree in Siberia! Was there ever anything so pretty?"

"There are whole orchards in Siberia now," put in Katya.

Shivering apple-trees, up to their knees in snow, blooming in the northland—white harbingers of a new beauty! Not a wild elemental beauty, ill-disposed and often fatal to man, but a beauty born of knowledge, and created by man himself, to bring him joy and happiness.

"That is what Lysenko speaks about," said Stepan. "He calls upon us to make everything over, to fit Nature to our needs."

"But according to what we are told in the university, it seems man is helpless to do anything for himself," said Katya sternly. "Just sit and wait."

Nikita laughed.

"Nobody'll make us count chromosomes now. And you, Arkadi," Nikita gave him a friendly pat on the shoulder, "will have to make the acquaintance of live mousies and observe them as they run about the earth—see if you won't!"

"You seem to have read the report, but we haven't," said someone in injured tones. "Read it out loud, Marina—from the very beginning, so that we all can hear."

It was getting dark when the reading ended, but no one got up to go. They were too absorbed in their thoughts and impressions. A fight was going on in Moscow—a fight for them, for their future, for their place in the

world as scientists of an entirely new type. What Lysenko had said opened up untold possibilities to each of them. The new scientists would become builders of a new world.

"How wonderful that it turned out this way!" exclaimed Marina. "All of us felt that something was wrong. There was good reason for Fyodor Fyodorovich to quarrel with Nikolai Alexandrovich, and for all of us to groan under the pressure of Shumsky's genes. Now everything will be different. They say a new university is to be built on Lenin Hills."

"The idea of building a university there is very old," Varya put in. "There was such a project in the time of Catherine the Great. And Herzen and Ogaryov used to go there to walk and dream. If they could have foreseen this!"

"Only think of it—a new university, on the top of a hill," Marina went on, "with the whole of Moscow spreading below—a beautiful new building with the most modern laboratories. And Shumsky to teach there? This thought always troubled me. And it troubled Fyodor Fyodorovich, too. There were many things we failed to see."

"I've thought about that, too," interposed Varya, with unwonted animation. "May I speak?"

"Do, Varya," said Gromada, who had been listening without a word, his eyes shining happily: let them speak up, let them draw their own conclusions.

"I want to tell you about our children's home," said Varya, to everyone's surprise. Someone shrugged a shoulder. What connection could there be between a children's home and Lysenko's report?

The children's home in which Varya had been brought up was located in a small town near Moscow. It was one of the towns razed by Hitler invaders during the war. At first the children were quartered in a tiny house which, by some miracle, remained standing among the ruins.

Little by little the orphaned children began to improve their conditions. Varya told about the solemn celebration held when the corner-stone of a new house, which later became the children's dormitories, was laid. She told about the planting of the first apple-tree in the orchard, and the arrival of a large basket of fluffy, peeping little chicks. The children had their own holidays, such as "New House Day", "First Apple Day", and "Chirping Chick Day". "Chirping Chick Day" was their favourite, and the older children always gave presents to the younger ones on this holiday.

The students listened to Varya attentively, and gradually they perceived the connection between what she said and what had taken place that day at the session of the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences of the U.S.S.R.

"Each of us older children chose a 'sister' or 'brother' from among the younger ones," said Varya. "My brother was Petya. They brought him to our home one winter evening when I was on duty. When the Red Army man gave him into my care, Petya was trembling like a leaf with cold. I took him in my arms, carried him to the stove, and threw some birch-bark on the fire. I expected him to be happy and stretch out his hands to the flames. I wanted to see him smile, though I was afraid it would hurt him to smile, for he had a large gash in his cheek that had not yet healed. When the fire leaped up, Petya cried out and began rushing about the room, hurling himself against the wall in search of the door and shouting 'Fire! Fire!' The first time he smiled was when he saw the little chicks. Petya's a big boy now, and his teachers say he is very capable, especially in physics. I got a letter from him yesterday." Varya pulled out a large envelope addressed in a round, careful hand, and displayed it as if afraid her audience might doubt her words. "What I wanted to say was that when I heard about the

new university I was happy to think that Petya would study there and be taught by such people as Fyodor Fyodorovich. Perhaps I don't understand everything in the report we just read, but I know one thing: it speaks about using science to make people happy and the world a better place to live in; to enrich the earth, so that there will be enough of everything to go round. We can't permit the world to go to war again; to have children wounded and orphaned again. If you had ever heard our little ones cry at night, you'd know what I mean. We couldn't put them to sleep. No sooner would they drows off than they would dream about the horrors they had seen and wake up. Sometimes we would sit beside them all night, holding their hands and saying over and over: 'Go to sleep, dear, go to sleep; there's no more war now, the war's over; go to sleep.' "

She stopped and glanced about, seeking a means of slipping away so that no one would see her agitation, but Gromada took her by the arm and drew her to a seat beside him. Then he said softly:

"Varya has spoken very well. To-day Trofim Denisovich Lysenko made a report on the new approach to science—the Soviet approach, whose sole aim is to bring peace and happiness to mankind. But we must watch our step, Comrades," he said suddenly. "You and I are the masters of this earth, but we must be more watchful, more vigilant. Do you know what happened a few days ago? Professor Lopatin was dismissed from the university! Yes, it's true," he said, waving down the outburst of indignation. "No less than that. Shumsky and Company. He was in their way. When you read the discussion following the report, you will realize what a struggle has been going on. But remember one thing, Comrades: everything is not over; you and I will have to keep up the good fight. Twelve years ago Lysenko had his first clash with the followers of Mendel. Twelve years ago! Only now have

we a clear picture of what has been accomplished by disciples of Michurin and Lysenko during those twelve years, and what has been accomplished by Mendel's followers. For twelve years Mendel's followers have been counting chromosomes, making elaborate calculations, applying rules of arithmetic to Nature, and deterring the progress of science. During the same period, Soviet people, under the leadership of the Communist Party, have raised new strains of wheat on millions of hectares of land, bred new strains of cattle, developed new sorts of fruit. You were busy growing up during those years, but the struggle was waged in your interests. On wheat fields, as well as on battle-fields, where we, your elder brothers, fought for you. You must always keep that in mind...."

The next morning, when everyone else was still asleep in the girls' house, Lyuba ran to the nearby town for a copy of the morning paper. She feared she might be too late, but at the District Komsomol Committee one copy of *Pravda* had been put aside for the students of the biological station. Lyuba did not wait to reach home; she read it right there in the square beside the District Committee building. Never before had she devoured a paper so ravenously. Usually she read to find out what others were doing. This time she read to find out what she herself must do. When she had finished, she ran back down the street in the direction of the biological station, the paper clutched in her hand.

Everything was clear—every single thing—all the criticism she had received of late: Vera Vasilievna's rebukes, Gromada's sardonic remarks, and the talk she had had with Alexei. Lyuba looked highly displeased, and she kept whispering to herself: Enough of this, young lady! A fine Komsomol Organizer you turned out to be! Yesterday a meeting was held, and it wasn't you who called it—the students did it themselves, because they

had something important they wanted to talk about. And what sort of meetings do *you* hold? Not once have you called the students together to discuss their profession. Haven't any of them made a mistake in choosing a field for specialization? You don't know. What *do* you know? Belevsky, for instance—aren't there any others like him in your class? Are you sure? Humph!

The newly-laid pavement flashed by under her feet. On either hand rose new houses, and rows of young trees lined the street. This little town, burnt down during the war, had recently been rebuilt.

Every house, every street, every tree, was younger than Lyuba herself.

Soon she was at the edge of the town, where the houses overlooked fields of buckwheat, stretching away in billows of pink bloom. The air was filled with the fragrance of the dewy blossoms.

Lyuba turned to look back. The streets radiated out to the pink field from the centre of this town that was younger than Lyuba. She was older than many of the towns in her land, and than many of the scientific discoveries that had been made. Now the time had come for *her* to build towns and make scientific discoveries. She, as a Komsomol leader, was responsible not only for the conduct of her comrades, but for their courage, justice, integrity, and the seriousness of their thinking as well. That was what was meant by being grown-up.

It was difficult to walk along the road, which had not yet dried after the rain. It ought to be paved. Corn-flowers glimpsed invitingly from among the stalks of wheat. But Lyuba was immune to their charms; let them grow in flower-gardens and hot-houses if they liked, but she would not allow them to steal nourishment from the wheat!

It was all up to her now.

As she walked past the wheat on that warm summer day, Lyuba, as so many Komsomol members before her, voluntarily assumed responsibility for everything that happened in her country. And she didn't find the burden unpleasant.

... We grown-ups often look upon them as mere children. They sometimes come late to classes at the university, are noisy at lectures, and often make slipshod preparation for their examinations. And they sometimes fall in love very foolishly. "Our young people's lives have been made joyous and easy," we say condescendingly, feeling no exasperation, for we know that we ourselves have done it. And we have done it because of the generations of Russian children who never had anybody to make life joyous and easy for them.

We Soviet people are lenient with our children because we cannot forget all those little Russian boys who remained shepherds to the end of their days, instead of becoming the scientists, architects, or engineers they might have been. We cannot forget all the little Russian girls who were fated never to know the joy of true love, the happiness of having work of their own choice, of being honoured and respected.

We are lenient to them without fear of their becoming spoiled, for we know our children, and have not been disappointed in them.

From the day when the first Komsomol members, rifle in hand, listened to the voice of Lenin in that hall in Malaya Dmitrovka Street* and saw his hand upraised, pointing them the way, each new generation of Komsomol members has in turn followed the bidding of that

* In this hall, in October 1920, Lenin made a famous speech, addressing the Third Komsomol Congress.—Tr.

hand and that voice, just as fledglings leave their parents' warm nest to soar aloft into the great world.

At first it is hard to realize that they have grown up. It is only when we get our first letter from a son employed on some distant construction job, or take our daughter's first baby into our arms, that the knowledge is suddenly brought home. Yes, our children, our children upon whom all the riches and love and care of our country have been lavished, who have basked in the sun of Young Pioneer camps—these children are no longer children. They are doctors, teachers, officers—our comrades and contemporaries. With every hour the difference between our ages grows less, for in our country people grow up quickly, but never grow old.

When Lyuba had almost reached the biological station, a boy on a bicycle sped past her.

"Yura!" she called.

Yura turned his head, waved, and continued on his way.

Lyuba stood looking after him.

"Didn't even stop," she thought.

There was no reason for taking offence this time. Lyuba herself had always preached that one should sacrifice individual interests to social ones. And that was exactly what Yura was doing—he was off to canvass The Streams Kolkhoz for at least one copy of *Pravda*—they were all sold out at the news-stand in the post-office.

None of the girls were in when Lyuba reached their house. In the little room Boris was snorting and grunting over a piece of rusty wire.

"Have you had your lunch?" Lyuba asked him in a severe voice.

Boris could not remember whether he had or not. He was suffering the pangs of creative effort. For five days he had been labouring with hammer and pliers, littering the floor with wire, sticks and boards. Sadly Vera

Vasilievna swept up the rubbish and acknowledged to herself that her son was more inclined to his father's profession of radio engineering than to hers of biology. Each of the parents had been fighting hard to win the boy over. Pictures of both Popov and Michurin hung in Boris' room and stole jealous glances at each other. This summer Vena Vasilievna had brought her son to the biological station, to the birds and animals and the river, and what was the result? He was busy making something—a radio set, of course.

But it was *not* a radio set Boris was making. He refused to say what it was, for he feared his invention might turn out a failure and then his mother would laugh at him. Perhaps he would have told Vera Vasilievna if she had asked. But, being an experienced teacher, Vena Vasilievna never pressed children with questions. She observed them and waited for them to volunteer their confidences. The only thing she allowed herself to do in the present case was to angrily kick aside the rusty wire that kept getting under her feet.

Lyuba was not an experienced teacher, but she was inquisitive. Three years before she had been elected a member of the student committee at her school. Boris was also a member, and so now he spoke to her as one comrade to another, forgetting that while three years earlier there had only been a difference of six forms between them, now they were separated by Lyuba's being grown-up and a university student, while he was still a school-boy.

Boris was inventing an apparatus to be applied to biology. The students kept asking him to substitute for them when they were scheduled to be on duty at a nest. At first he agreed enthusiastically, then politely, at last reluctantly. They asked him to take over one watch after another, for every day brought new matters for them to attend to.

No watch was kept on rainy days. The fledglings had grown up, and their mothers were astonished to see babies who only a few days earlier had been helplessly opening their yellow beaks to be fed, now fly past them, skilfully manipulating their wings. Perhaps another reason for Boris not having told his mother about his invention was that she, like any other mother, would hardly believe that her child was able to use his wings already. It is easier for our contemporaries to believe this, for they never remember us as infants.

Lyuba listened attentively to Boris' story. She promised not to tell his secret to anyone.

Boris was inventing an apparatus that would take his place at the nests. As a man of foresight, he realized that he might be molested the following summer as he had been this. He knew very well how chiff-chaffs and woodpeckers and goldfinches and wrens fed their young, therefore he was making a very simple apparatus comprised of two boards and electric wires connected with the nest on one hand, and a recording device on the other, which was to register every flight of a parent-bird to the nest and the length of its stay. This apparatus was the first invention of the future biologist and inventor.

His father and mother—Soviet engineer and Soviet biologist—wished to hand down to their son what was dearest to them in their cherished work, and they had been successful. Engineering in the service of biology, new and precise research methods—this was what their son's generation of scientists would have.

Lyuba looked through the paper once more and decided to call a Komsomol meeting for that evening. When she got to the boys' living quarters, however, she found that everyone had already gathered. Alexei, Anna and Shura had come from the collective farm, bringing a copy of *Pravda* with them. Marina was reading aloud. Lyuba seated herself modestly in a corner. Now she knew

that if she wished to have all the students with her, she must discover what each individual among them thought, must learn to listen when her comrades read the newspaper aloud, and take in their reactions.

CHAPTER 23

On the third day of the session of the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences of the U.S.S.R., Fyodor Fyodorovich left his house earlier than usual in order to drop in at Sharov's and fetch him.

He had wanted to speak to Sharov two days before, immediately after Lysenko's speech, but had not been able to reach him. At every step he had been stopped by friends, and he had difficulty in making his way through the excited crowd. At last he had caught sight of his old friend standing by a window all alone, and had rushed towards him, but just then someone called him by name, and he turned round.

"Professor Lopatin! How glad I am to see you!" cried Sumarev as he approached him.

The day before, Sumarev had ascended the platform with a cherry-branch in his hand. Though the branch was withered, its brown leaves and large dark shrivelled cherries were very impressive. It was easy to imagine how the branch had been bowed down beneath the weight of the cherries, and what the tree—a whole orchard of such trees—must look like. Sumarev had cultivated these trees in the Leningrad Region.

Holding the branch high, he had said:

"We have produced these cherries by grafting one variety on to another. The new species, 'Victory Cherry', was created by applying Michurin's 'mentor' method. The followers of Mendel assert that only the reproductive cells carry the hereditary traits, but we have proved that all

cells play a leading role in the development of these traits."

Sumarev soon finished speaking. There had been no need for him to make a long speech. The cherries spoke for themselves. He had been constantly hampered, had lost his post, had been anathematized in long speeches and thunderous articles, but his trees had grown, blossomed and borne fruit. And here was the Leningrad cherry —juicy, fragrant, with a bitter-sweet stone.

Fyodor Fyodorovich had not seen Sumarev for a long time. They had met only once since the session of the Academy of Agricultural Sciences twelve years before, and that quite by chance, at a remote Arctic experimental station, when they had talked all through the night.

"Well," said Lopatin, "so the struggle which began twelve years ago is still going on. I can imagine how happy you must feel to-day!"

"And where are you working now, Professor Lopatin?" asked Sumarev. "I read your paper on the acclimatization of fur-bearing animals in Siberia with great interest."

"I'm teaching at the university, as usual."

"You managed to get on with them? Or have you survived by sheer luck?" asked Sumarev after a slight pause.

Lopatin calmly met his glance, and then suddenly broke into a laugh.

"They turned me out a week ago," he said with relish. Then, growing grave, he added: "As a matter of fact, I did manage to get on with them for some time. I took too much for granted. I've only understood it recently. To tell you the truth it's only to-day that I grasped the whole situation."

After this talk Lopatin's desire to see Sharov became greater still. His old friend, Nikolai Alexandrovich Sharov, was due to address the following day's session. And he would have to speak as one who not only "got on" with the followers of Mendel, but shared certain of their

views. But Sharov did not go to that session. Fyodor Fyodorovich did not want to call him up. Their talk was to be too long and serious for a telephone conversation. And now in a few minutes he would see Sharov. They would have a good long chat as in the old days. And they would understand one another, as before. Fyodor Fyodorovich hesitated when he reached the door, and tried to conquer his emotion.

For a long time nobody answered the bell, but at last Lopatin heard the familiar shuffling of slippers feet. Nadya, Sharov's wife, opened the door with a tear-stained face. In a single day she had become bent and haggard. There was an unusual stillness and a smell of medicine in the hall. The high-pitched old voice, the laughter, the cracked bass of the 'cello were all silent.

"He's in bed, Fyodor," said Nadya. "Just think—he's ill."

Fyodor Fyodorovich retreated a step. His arms hung helplessly at his sides. He stood for a few moments in the dark hall, and then tiptoed forward. Sharov was lying with his hands resting on a stomach so enormous that his fingers did not touch. The round face, white as the pillow it lay on, did not turn when the door creaked. Fyodor Fyodorovich spoke his name, but the sick man cast an indifferent glance at him and closed his eyes. Fyodor Fyodorovich moved towards the window. If Khrust or Shumsky had happened to be near him at that moment, he felt as if he would have torn them to pieces. "To have ruined a man like that!" he whispered furiously. Then he said, trying to make his voice sound as calm as possible:

"Why are you in bed? Get up!"

Sharov turned his head painfully. "What for?" His voice was hollow, unfamiliar, frightening.

"You should have taken to your bed before," said Fyodor Fyodorovich. "You should have taken to your bed when you became friends with Shumsky, when you filled

your laboratory with Shumsky's henchmen, when you let Gromada leave you, when you quarrelled with me. But this is no time for lying in bed. Do you think you'll be allowed to twiddle your thumbs?"

"Fyodor Fyodorovich!" called Nadya, opening the door softly.

Fyodor Fyodorovich obediently followed her into the dining-room.

"You must not upset him. His heart's very bad. Very bad indeed."

"Give him tincture of valerian then," answered Fyodor Fyodorovich in make-believe irritation. "Or *Convallaria Majalis*, or laurel-water. The trouble with his heart is the burden lying on it, the burden of a mistake he made. Well—what if he did make a mistake? I was mistaken, too. But I didn't take to my bed. I have no right to. This is not the time for it. I've come to talk business to him, and he lolls in bed."

"How can you think of talking business to him, Fyodor? Leave him alone."

"I must earnestly request you not to talk about business to the patient!"

Only now did Fyodor Fyodorovich notice that there was a young woman in the room—a doctor. Articles he had never before seen in Sharov's rooms were spread out on the table by which she was sitting: a sterilizer, ampules, phials. The doctor looked extremely young, but she had already acquired that implacable sternness of manner which often marks those who feel themselves responsible for human lives.

"No business talk," she repeated.

Sharov called, and Nadya hurried to his side.

"It is a very grave case," said the doctor. "We have given him a camphor injection. The pulse is highly unsatisfactory."

The bell rang. Fyodor Fyodorovich stepped resolutely out to answer it. He was sure it was Shumsky who had come in quest of sympathy. Fyodor Fyodorovich was ready to kick him down the stairs. He'd had enough of this. He would not let anyone hurt his friend any more.

But the visitor turned out to be Chebrets.

"They told me he was ill."

"He's in bed," said Fyodor Fyodorovich. "This is the first time he's taken to his bed in the 40 years I have known him. To think that during the happiest days of my life there should be such a misfortune! And the worst of it is that it's my own fault, Ilya!"

"Calm yourself, Fyodor Fyodorovich!" said Chebrets. "I for one am sure he'll get over it. And I'm very glad to find you here."

"And I'm glad you're here, too," said Lopatin. For a while he said nothing more; then, turning to the doctor: "Listen, Doctor, you are a serious person, I'm sure, and you must know all sorts of remedies which have saved the lives of innumerable patients. But there are other remedies which you may not have heard of yet. You won't interfere with us if we try them, will you?"

At that moment Nadya came back, looking imploringly at Lopatin as relatives often look at anybody who has been alone with the doctor and may have learned the terrible truth which is kept from themselves.

"Why do you treat your spouse like that, Nadya? Give him tincture of valerian," he repeated. "No more than fifteen drops, though. For a man who is not used to it, medicine may prove poisonous."

Gently pushing her aside, Fyodor Fyodorovich went back to the sick man. Chebrets followed him.

"What's all this?" Lopatin threw at Sharov. "Doctors, medicine.... You have let yourself go. Here's

Chebrets, come to talk business to you, and you lie in bed."

Sharov stretched out a hand to Lopatin, who took it in his own, pretending not to notice how feeble and moist it felt.

"Yes, yes," he went on. "You and I have been much too trustful, old man. And now we feel bad about it. Let me tell you, you are not alone. We have all been to blame. I myself, first and foremost, and Chebrets, and that Gromada of yours, too." Fyodor Fyodorovich had emphasized the words "of yours". "We haven't stood by our faculty as we should have. But now we've come to our senses. We've had outside help...."

"You're letting us down, Professor," contributed Chebrets in a matter-of-fact tone.

Slowly rolling his head on the pillow, Sharov looked suspiciously from Lopatin to Chebrets. Were they trying to console him? But no, they spoke as if they did not take his illness into consideration. Neither Lopatin nor Chebrets made any allowances, and it did not look as if they intended to.

"Perhaps you were better able to make a stand because you are members of the Party," he said in a hollow voice, "and I'm not."

"No," answered Chebrets, "non-Party people have fought in the struggle, and fought well. Don't try to justify yourself on those grounds."

Lopatin got up and paced angrily about the room. He stamped loudly, now brushing against a chair, now knocking a book down, and strangely enough, the irritated tones of his voice and the violence of his movements helped to restore Sharov's peace of mind, where low voices, soft steps and tincture of valerian had failed.

"You've chosen the wrong time to be ill," repeated Chebrets. "Frankly, I expected to hear you speak yesterday. You've let us down. A young biologist came up

to me and said: 'I wonder how Sharov takes it?' and I laughed at him. 'You youngsters don't know what our old people are made of,' I told him. 'Their hearts never fail them in action.' And here you are...."

"Yes, you have let us down," chimed in Fyodor Fyodorovich. "Only yesterday Chebrets came up to me at the session and said: 'A new programme will have to be worked out for the Chair, you must see Sharov about it immediately. And Sharov's playing the coward. Do you mean that we should work out the plan without you? Anybody might think we have so many Sharovs we don't know what to do with them. How long have you been working, eh?"

"Forty-three years." The round head was lifted slightly from the pillow.

"I thought it was forty-one. I lost count. Not bad, not bad...."

Both Lopatin and Chebrets were acting under a tremendous strain. Each knew what the other was thinking at the moment. Both were trying to find words which would rouse the man who had been struck down, not by illness, but by that sense of guilt which is unbearable to an honest, true scientist.

"Let's talk it out," said Lopatin harshly. "Let's talk it out, Nikolai Alexandrovich. What is it that upset you? Is it Lysenko's report? Don't you approve of it?"

Sharov raised his head in indignation, and let it drop on the pillow again.

"Do you consider that you have been working on the right lines during the last few years? And that Shumsky was right? You took to your bed, grew faint of heart, lost spirit. Why? Is it because Lysenko's report annihilates Shumsky and his followers? Do you consider that unjust? Or is it that you fear unpleasant consequences for yourself?"

Sharov was silent.

"Who's in the right? Shumsky and his friends, or we? If Lysenko's report convinced you, and you spent sleepless nights thinking it over until you understood he was right, why should that upset you?"

"I'm an old man," the answer came in a hollow voice. "One must not err in old age—no time to set one's mistakes right."

"So that's it!" cried Fyodor Fyodorovich, pressing close to the bed. "So the thing I considered impossible has happened: my oldest friend, Nikolai Alexandrovich Sharov, instead of rejoicing over the victory of advanced scientific thought in his country, is indulging in self-pity, is thinking of nothing but himself."

Sharov waved his hand angrily before him as if warding off the unjust words being hurled at him.

"No, no, I won't believe that. I won't," Chebrets broke in heatedly. "I know Sharov would not make the fawning avowal of repentance that Shumsky did yesterday. Shumsky was saving his skin, he wasn't bothered by his conscience. Of course it must be more painful for you than it was for him."

"His case is quite different," interrupted Lopatin. "Shumsky sought fame, prosperity, power. You never sinned that way. You were simply mistaken, you did not keep up with advanced scientific thought, you lost your enthusiasm, and drifted into supporting the enemies of progressive science. That's different. I expected you to come out into the open and make a clean breast of it. I thought that, hard as it was, you would rejoice the way I did. Do you think it is easy for me? I have much to blame myself for, too! And I will speak about it. I have nothing to fear from my Party, my own people. I'm not a Shumsky."

"Listen to me, Nikolai Alexandrovich," began Chebrets, moving nearer to the bed and bending over Sharov. "We can't do without you. We have to revise the pro-

gramme of our work at the faculty. And we must have you to help us. Do you understand that? And it is absolutely necessary for you to speak at the session. Shumsky has mentioned you several times. Did you know that? And don't forget that directly the session is over, Lopatin and you and I and other comrades will have to go to the Central Committee of the Party and tell them how we mean to work after this crisis in the science of biology."

Chebrets walked away to the window and stood with his back to Sharov. Lopatin joined him there. Both of them realized that if those last words of Chebrets did not rouse Sharov, nothing would.

"My slippers, Nadya!" came from the sofa in the dear familiar high-pitched voice. "Nadya!"

"Don't think of going out to-day, Nikolai! Stay at home until you are better. I forbid you to get up," said Lopatin.

"Nadya, my slippers!" cried Sharov again.

But Chebrets went up to him, and said, smiling gravely:

"I forbid it, too. I'd consider it a breach of Party discipline."

The sight of Sharov's joyous countenance was too much for Lopatin, who hastily retreated to the dining-room and sank wearily into an arm-chair.

"What have you done to him?" said Nadya anxiously.

"If a man's needed, he has no time to be ill," began Lopatin solemnly, "and if he knows that justice has triumphed, there's no reason for him to be ill."

Nadya looked at him with profound respect, as if he were a doctor who had discovered a new cure. And Lopatin sat on in the arm-chair, afraid to go back to Sharov's study. He was unpleasantly aware that his knees were shaking. When he calmed down sufficiently to venture into the study, an animated conversation was in progress.

"Everything that we heard the day before yesterday," Sharov was saying, in his reedy voice, "is of the utmost interest. It is a new and desirable development of scientific thought. And what a scope, what experiments! All except what he says about the intra-species struggle. There I admit I disagree. By the way, that's something quite new, isn't it, Fyodor?"

"It is," smiled Lopatin.

Here Chebrets joined in the conversation:

"I admit I don't understand it yet; I would ask the biologists to put it into plainer language."

"Why, it's a new interpretation of the species," exclaimed Lopatin. "An interpretation which will put power into our hands. There is no intra-species struggle."

"And what about the finches?" put in Chebrets. "What about their fight for nesting-sectors? It was you who told me about that, Fyodor Fyodorovich."

"Ah-ha!" struck in Sharov. "Your finches have let you down, have they?"

Lopatin laughed.

"That's not a struggle, it's a mere squabble. The bird way of settling things. The most rational division of territory. Each finch fights for the space in the woods which it requires to feed its fledglings, and each bird it drives away settles farther on, at the border of the sector or in a neighbouring sector, and seizes yet another plot of land for the finch family. See what the struggle is about? Whom does it favour? The species. The struggle for the increase of the land belonging to the finches.

"Splendid! I'm gradually beginning to understand," said Chebrets. "Simple and interesting. And overthrows the Malthusian theory of over-population. It does, doesn't it, Fyodor Fyodorovich?"

Sharov raised himself on his pillows and said, after a pause:

"I'll think it over. But I'm sure you're over-simplifying things, Fyodor. It's much more complex, in reality."

"Of course it is," interrupted Lopatin. "I only tried to throw light on the very essence of the matter, as I see it. And as you see it, but because of your confounded obstinacy——"

"They've made it up," said Chebrets in relieved tones. "They've made it up, thank goodness! All over again. . . ."

Sharov and Lopatin laughed heartily.

"Come on, Fyodor Fyodorovich," coaxed Chebrets, afraid that the old men would start quarrelling again. "We'll settle the Shumskyites," he added, "and then we'll go on again. Our main task at the moment is to get rid of all those who are dragging science backwards." He turned to Lopatin and asked in a voice tinged with malice: "Sure you weren't sorry for Shumsky yesterday? You're so kind, you know!"

"He's a weed," said Lopatin, wrinkling up his features in disgust. "A weed. A horrid, squashy weed. The trouble with us is that while we can see and understand a weed, we temporize—perhaps it's useful in some way, perhaps it has rubber in its roots. It may be bitter, and yet have medicinal value. We test it, find out it's worthless, and still we hesitate: what if there is some little good in it? But I know that if a tree is being strangled by weeds in my orchard, it's my job to uproot them. I don't think about the feelings of weeds."

Once in the street, Lopatin drew a deep breath of satisfaction.

During the session Fyodor Fyodorovich went about in a state of elation. The walls of the meeting-hall seemed to have moved apart, and finally vanished.

Twelve years after Lysenko made his first attack, the Michurinists had resumed the struggle, their lances—wheat-stalks; their hand-grenades—Ukrainian potatoes. Armies of fruit and vegetables attacked the enemy, and

the enemy retreated and sought cover.... And these were not merely the fruit, the grain and the vegetables raised on carefully tended experimental plots—they were growing over thousands of hectares of kolkhoz soil. And the austere atmosphere of the hall seemed to be pervaded with the homely smells of the earth, of grain, of fresh fruit....

They were approaching the building. Lopatin was at peace with himself and the world. Never before had he felt so strong as on that morning.

He felt that now he could look people in the eye again. What if he had made mistakes? At the most difficult moment he had understood the truth, and he had been firm because he had never sought isolation, but had always marched forward with his fellows. And now, at the session, his teachers, comrades and pupils—all that had been most upright in the past, all that constituted their pride in the present, all that was most daring in the future of Soviet science, the science of conquerors, of truth and the happiness of mankind—all that was marching beside him.

CHAPTER 24

Lopatin went back to the biological station alone. Sharov had gone down the day before.

The wren was the first to greet Fyodor Fyodorovich. It was behaving very strangely. Instead of flying away in fright, it seemed to be trying to draw Lopatin's attention to itself, leaping from bough to bough, suddenly fluttering up from the ground in front of him, crying something to him, jerking its perpendicular tail.

"Protecting its fledglings," muttered Fyodor Fyodorovich to himself.

The guess proved correct. The father-wren was risking its life to protect its young. He was trying to lure

Fyodor Fyodorovich away, trying to lead him in another direction, but Fyodor Fyodorovich ruthlessly made for the nut-grove. The wren was in a frenzy of excitement. Pathetic, small, quite helpless, it made anxious piping sounds and fluttered its wings. There were six fledglings in all. They were learning to fly. Silly and inexperienced, they feared no one and regarded human beings with gay insouciance. But on hearing their parent's cries of warning, they began sidling towards him.

The wren's children were remarkably like chestnuts, both in size and colouring. They imitated their father in everything: turned up their weedy tails arrogantly, glanced out of the corner of their eyes, flapped their wings in a sweeping gesture as if they were about to soar to the skies. But their strength failed them, and they had to come to rest on a nearby branch. They descended, however, with a saucy flip of their tails, as if they had meant all along to perch on that very branch and enjoy themselves. And if their beaks were open, it was just because they liked to keep them open, not because they were exhausted. The parents darted about anxiously above the bush.

"It's all right, duckies!" said Fyodor Fyodorovich in tones of kindly reassurance.

He felt he was very lucky to have fallen in with these little ones. It warmed his heart and made him feel still better, although only a moment ago as he was walking along it had seemed to him that he could not have felt better.

When he got out to the road, Fyodor Fyodorovich came face to face with Yura. But instead of rushing to meet him, as might have been expected, Yura plunged back, shouting:

"Here he comes!"

And suddenly students came pouring from all directions into the road. It was obvious that "look-outs" must

have been posted there since morning, so as to meet Fyodor Fyodorovich the moment he appeared.

It took Fyodor Fyodorovich not less than three hours to get from the gate of the biological station to his hut. The students crowded round him, and it was all he could do to reply to their questions, return their hand-shakes, give back smiles for smiles. Gromada strode beside him like a body-guard, trying to cut a path through the gay, animated, noisy crowd. There was, however, a moment when they all fell silent, standing expectantly round Fyodor Fyodorovich. This was when Gromada triumphantly handed him a number of folded telegrams.

"Good gracious, he won't have enough money left for the way back!" exclaimed Fyodor Fyodorovich with a compassionate gesture. "You can see that he addressed them to three places at once. One home, one to the university, and one, apparently, here."

"From your son?" smiled Gromada.

"From my son."

Fyodor Fyodorovich read all the telegrams, one after another, attentively. Maxim, who was at the moment on an expedition, congratulated the university, his father, the students, Sharov, Chebrets and Gromada.

"The exclamation marks alone must have cost five rubles," remarked Fyodor Fyodorovich, carefully folding up the telegrams and putting them in his pocket. "He congratulates everyone," he said, turning to the students, once again scanning the dear, familiar faces.

He knew all that had taken place at the biological station during the last few days. He had thought about it in Moscow, picturing to himself their excitement, the sleepless nights, the heated talks, the arguments....

His pupils had grown during this time. Lopatin knew young people too well to doubt this. Things had happened just as he had thought they would. They had met every evening—the students, friends from The Streams,

the radiant Vena Vasilievna—reading the papers, arguing, dreaming.

It was their baptism of fire. So far, they were posted over a tiny sector of the vast battle-field on which their teachers and commanders were fighting. But they too had their task to do in the fight; before them towered a height which it was for them to storm. And like youthful warriors they had grown in courage and experience in this, their first battle. And the older they grew, the more each one began thinking for himself, and the stronger was their desire to be together. Now they were sharing a joy of victory that was tempered by a new sense of responsibility. Those very laws of discipline which yesterday had seemed oppressive, to-day seemed to issue from their own consciousness, quite naturally and simply. Some of the students had actually asked Vera Vasilievna to return them the work they had already handed in. "It must be revised, I simply must revise it." What had seemed good enough before, no longer satisfied them. Minutes became precious. "Who's that whispering in the laboratory? No time for that, you know. Who was late?"

Seldom had they felt happier than now, in this new, austere, fighting mood; seldom had they laughed so much, or felt such deep friendship for one another.

Many students related to Lopatin some new experiment, some new idea, some new dream....

Fyodor Fyodorovich had to tell as quickly as possible, and at the same time in considerable detail, what Lysenko had said, and how he had been listened to, who had spoken, what had happened to Shumsky, how many people there had been at the session, what new strains had been shown, and what the zoologists were to do now.

They read all there was in the press about the session. They, too, like many thousands of Soviet men and women, had torn the newspapers out of each other's

hands or run several kilometres to the post-office to get the day's paper—excited, happy.

And Fyodor Fyodorovich did not go into his little house. He sat down on the steps and the students ranged themselves round him on the grass.

Sharov, panting slightly, hurried up and embraced Lopatin, and Fyodor Fyodorovich could see from the way the students smiled at him that they loved Sharov as he did, and believed in him.

Nikita reminded Fyodor Fyodorovich that there was to be a wedding at The Streams that day.

"I came just in time," said Fyodor Fyodorovich jovially. "I did remember it, you know, and I was afraid I might be late."

They moved in a body towards The Streams.

At last the whole district had an opportunity to see the horses they had at The Streams.

The road ran in a straight line from The Streams to the district centre, and the *troikas* sped over it so swiftly that the rye on either side swayed in the breeze they set up. The horses trotted along evenly, never breaking step, their proud heads arched over their chests. Their silky tails streamed out behind them and fluttered in the wind. They were adorned with ribbons and the ribbons, too, streamed out in the wind and fluttered over the grey manes. The horses were not used to ribbons, and their nervousness made them still handsomer.

Now they were nearing the town, one *troika* hard on the heels of another....

A band was playing in the square. Couples were dancing.

The head *troika* stopped in front of the porch of the registrar's office. The horses stood panting, and quivers passed over their smooth backs, now dark with sweat.

The band struck a solemn chord. The first to set foot on the steps to the porch were Anna and Alexei. Anna had a hazy vision of horses, ribbons, laughing faces, and she heard the music as if in a dream.

She paused and began slowly mounting the steps, lifting the hem of her long blue silk dress. Alexei pressed her free hand and whispered, "Courage!" They were closely followed by Alexei's parents and Anna's mother.

When all the *troikas* had driven up—and they filled the street from end to end—a cart drawn by Ribka appeared. In the cart sat Zakhar Petrovich, his wife, and Zakhar Vasilievich. Zakhar Petrovich had tried to urge the mare on, but Ribka had no intention of hurrying. She was a workaday horse—none of your fast trotters. She had to cover a certain distance every day... why should she change her pace?

At last they got there, and Zakhar Petrovich led his wife to the porch and looked round severely to make certain all was as it should be.

Before the wedding guests arrived, the electrician Fedyo had set up a radiola in the room of the young couple. This was a gift from the kolkhoz. A carpet was spread on the floor, a warm, thick carpet, with poppies all over it. With a carpet like this the room would be as gay on a rainy day as it was when the sun shone.

There was an air of solemnity in the registrar's office. A young woman in a white blouse came forward to congratulate Alexei and Anna. The registrar, in a black suit smelling strongly of moth-balls, congratulated Anna too, and presented her with a bouquet.

The room was filled with music from the street, and the sunlight poured through the windows.

Anna's mother sobbed quietly—her daughter was having a lovely wedding!

After the ceremony they all went back to the kolkhoz, taking the band with them.

Tables were spread in the birch-copse on the bank of the river. There was no room large enough in the village to hold so many guests. People had come from neighbouring farms and from the district centre, and to these were added the students from the biological station. Sunshine sifted through the foliage, playing on jugs of wine, on plates and flowers.

Zakhar Petrovich had given orders that vodka and wine were to be served in moderation—to-morrow would be a working-day. But the guests all grew fairly mellow; whether it was from the wine or the sunshine and the greenery all round, or the company, or the music, or the joy, no one knew. Was it perhaps because the grain was rustling so cheerfully in the fields, and the horses were snorting in the stables, and light was shining in the houses? Everywhere was happiness, prosperity and joy. The intoxication of joy. Laughter and song rang out, mounting through the birch-foliage and soaring into the lofty blue sky.

Zakhar Petrovich was seated in state at one of the tables, looking very important. Fyodor Fyodorovich glanced at the chairman. He was broad-shouldered, and on the breast of his best coat were four orders—two military orders, two labour orders. He had got the first during the Civil War, the second in the collectivization period, the third as a partisan in the Great Patriotic War, and the fourth after the war was over, when he put the ruined kolkhoz on its feet in the space of two years. Four awards. Four times the people had said to him: thanks, soldier and farmer! When the people have to be fed, you sow the corn, when they have to be defended against the foe, you fight.

And Zakhar Petrovich glances at Fyodor Fyodorovich. A great scientist. One of our own. A warrior, he, too.

When it began to get dark, coloured lanterns were lighted over the glade. The leaves twinkled in the many-

coloured lights and fire-works flared in the sky. Boats began slowly floating down the river—the guests were being taken for a row.

In the glade they were dancing. Dancing and singing songs whose words seemed to have been specially written for the dancers.

Anna and Alexei were waltzing round and round, looking neither to right nor left, gazing steadfastly into each other's eyes.

Dusya was waltzing with the young doctor from the district hospital. The young doctor was too shy to speak; he only sighed.

And there were Marina and Gromada! Gromada was dancing with his shoulders held well back, going round at such a pace that his partner caught her breath, and the white trunks of the birch-trees, delicately stained by the coloured light from the lamps overhead, flashed dizzily by. But Marina only laughed. She had stopped frowning. Now her brows flew up like wings above her courageous grey eyes. She smiled on and on, without the least hesitation. Look at me smiling, Ivan! Look, beloved! See what hair I have, what eyes, what a mouth. Look! Look! And, come what may, love me!

And there are Stepan and Katya stepping out. It looks as if you'll be giving up Siberia for the fields near Kursk, Stepan!

Music and laughter, and a whispered word that dies away mysteriously.... How quickly it dies away! Before one has time to catch it. Its sound merges with the waltz, with the rustling of the leaves, with the laughter.... Perhaps it was spoken by somebody close by. Say it again. Do say that lovely word again.

On a bench near the pond, among the sedate ones, sit Nikita and Varya. Nikita is telling her about Chuvashia. Varya listens with parted lips, nodding her fair head. How wonderful it sounds! How wonderful it must be in

Nikita's home! And how wonderful his father must be! Varya moves her feet almost imperceptibly in time to the music. What a pity Nikita has been so sad and serious lately, what a pity he doesn't like dancing.

"Shall we dance?" he asks suddenly.

And they run to the platform and ask the band to play a Russian folk dance—Nikita can't dance any other. And they dance together. Nikita is light on his feet and his movements are sure. As for Varya, where does she get it from? The sly glance, the flying hand waving the handkerchief. Her small feet in the worn slippers float over the grass. Is that our quiet little Varya? See how she winds in and out, escaping his arms. How her soft hair glistens in the light.

Yura looks at them. "The fool has awakened at last," he thinks, glancing at Nikita. "Now he knows whether she's fair or dark." But his brows knit as he follows Nikita's glance, so wistful and longing, fixed on something beyond Varya's head. On what? On whom? On Alla, of course. But who's that other girl pouting in the corner there? What's that they're playing—a polka? Yura doesn't know how to dance the polka, but never mind that. Caper about—the girl is smiling now, and that's the great thing!

Fyodor Fyodorovich regarded his "sparrows", his youthful eyes brimming with merriment. Looking back, he caught sight of Alla and Zina in the distance. Alla's face was preoccupied and mournful—she was thinner. Fyodor Fyodorovich had often enough regarded her with unfriendly eyes, but this time his glance was sympathetic. "Should get to know her better," he thought, but on seeing the direction of Nikita's wistful glance he frowned and turned away.

Zakhar Petrovich was standing under a tree listening to the music. Zakhar Vasilievich went up to him. He, too, drew his breath lightly and joyfully. And they strolled

on side by side in happy silence, a little uncertain in their gait.

Suddenly Zakhar Vasilievich broke the silence: "What if it had rained?"

Zakhar Petrovich knew what he meant—the club-house of The Streams was small. Next year weddings would be held in the new club being built in the woods.

They found Fyodor Fyodorovich resting on a bench above the river, and sat down one on each side of him. They recalled the old superstition that a wish made by anyone sitting between two persons of the same name always comes true.

"But all my wishes come true, anyhow; I'm getting quite spoilt," replied Fyodor Fyodorovich. "During the last thirty years I've grown accustomed to that. I dreamed of the beaver being saved from extinction—and it has been. I dreamed the sable would breed in captivity—and it does. So you see I've got accustomed to it. Whenever I wish for something it comes true. I wished they'd build the university on Lenin Hills—and they are going to. I wished they wouldn't let Shumsky teach there—and they don't intend to. I wished the dean of the faculty would be a Michurinist, and they have sent Sumarev."

CHAPTER 25

It was quite by chance that Marina Dimkova went to the willow. She had not intended to. And it was unlikely that Ivan Ostapovich would come. But he knew it was one of her favourite haunts. And it was their last night at the biological station. But what of that? Since it was the last night, she felt the need of being by herself and thinking things over.

Someone sitting under the willow gave a sigh. One, and then another.

"Is that you, Varya?"

Varya moved to make room for Marina.

"I was just thinking."

"What about?"

"Oh, all sorts of things."

There was a moment's pause, and then Marina said briskly:

"Made up your mind about anything?"

"Not yet."

"All mixed up again?"

"Uh-huh."

"And must you get everything sorted out to-day?"

Marina ventured to ask. "Can't it wait?"

"No. I must make up my mind to-day."

"Let's, then."

"I've decided I don't know the first thing about science, or people either," blurted out Varya. "I—"

Marina meekly settled down to listen. Obviously this might last all night. "If a man like Lopatin couldn't see through Shumsky, how could we be expected to? And new Belevskys are sure to crop up. Of course there won't be so many, but there are sure to be some. Suppose you were to fall in love with somebody like Fyodor Fyodorovich, Marina, and he turned out a Shumsky!"

"Not very likely. And there'll be fewer and fewer Belevskys in the future. And Belevsky himself will change—see if he doesn't."

"We'll see," said Varya drily. "We shall see what we shall see. All right, let's go on: I don't understand a thing about the theory of the species."

"We haven't got to that," said Marina in a comically shrill voice, laughing at herself. Varya waited expectantly. "Whatever you ask my little brother," explained Marina, "he answers: 'we haven't come to that'. He's in the first form, and of course they really haven't got to anything. They've just got as far as the letter U. They

copied it four days running and at last he came home in tears: 'I'll do without it!' he said. 'I'm sick of the letter U.'

Varya laughed, then added gravely: "Perhaps we could get on without the letter U, but we can't possibly get on without understanding the theory of the species. And I don't understand. And we're in our third year, after all."

"As far as science goes, Varya, we're still more or less in the first form. Don't be so upset, we'll make it out. I think I do understand, but I couldn't explain it to you."

"You're so clever," said Varya wistfully.

"Me? Oh, Varya, I've become so stupid, you have no idea!"

Marina did not go on speaking; she was listening, smiling tenderly in the darkness.

"Ivan Ostapovich is coming," said Varya.

"What makes you think so?"

"He was here yesterday."

"Well, and what of it?"

"Nothing. He was here, that's all."

"And then what?"

"Nothing, I tell you. He said: 'All alone?' And I said: 'All alone.'"

"And then what?"

"Nothing. He sat down without saying anything, and smoked and then went away."

"I was at a kolkhoz, only got back to-day."

Gromada tapped on a branch with something hard—a cigarette-holder, perhaps.

"May I come in?"

Marina said nothing.

"Of course you may, Ivan Ostapovich," Varya welcomed him.

Gromada sat down on a root. It did not look par-

ticularly comfortable, but he sighed as contentedly as if he had just sunk into a hammock. He lit a cigarette. Marina kept very still. She did not even breathe. Varya, remembering her sorrows, heaved another sigh.

"Well..." said Gromada musingly. "What are you sighing about, Varya? Life getting hard? Got to think for yourself, and you're not used to that, are you?"

"You clever creature," said Marina to herself. "You darling."

"In three years we'll be going to work," said Varya in tremulous tones. "How can Fyodor Fyodorovich teach us everything in that time? How can we learn it all ourselves?"

"There's only one thing you've got to learn from him," said Gromada very gravely. "And if you learn that you'll never go wrong. It's to work for the people and not think about yourself. That's all."

"And how do I know that some of the Mendelists didn't think they were working for the good of the people, too?"

"They did. Their mistake was that they tried to make people's potentialities fit into their theories. And that's impossible. Well, it's true—in three years' time we'll all be separating, going all over the country. And we'll change the face of our native land. The forests will be denser than ever, and full of game. There'll be seas in desert places, fish in the seas, vineyards along the shores. And our children will be able to do everything. Whether they're engineers, doctors, or skilled workers, they'll be able to sing or play the piano or write books, and they'll all be athletes. They'll all be able to drive a car or fly a plane if necessary. And they'll be able to draw and take photographs and they'll always be reading. They'll be good-looking, educated, strong, gifted people."

"Nikita says," broke in Varya, "and he's right, of course, that Marina's like the people who will live under communism."

"Nikita's a fine fellow. He understands everything," said Gromada warmly.

"Oh, go on," said Marina.

"Trees will blossom where we want them, birds will fly where we send them—"

"You're like Yura, you're beginning to talk in poetry," smiled Varya.

Gromada cleared his throat, momentarily embarrassed, but went on at once, in a stern voice:

"There's no other way of talking about these things. Life is so wonderful that the simplest words you use to describe it sound like poetry."

The leaves over their heads began to show more distinctly. A ripple could be made out in the middle of the river.

Varya glanced from Gromada to Marina. She could see their faces now. She thought of saying something, and was afraid. She thought of getting up and going away, but was afraid of doing that, too. So she sat on in silence, seeing herself as others might see her, and horrified at the sight. Sitting there like an idiot and getting in the way of these two. She didn't need to see their eyes to realize what an idiot she was!

"I'm going," she said.

"Don't go, Varya," said Gromada, with obvious insincerity. And since he was not a very good liar, he suddenly got very busy lighting his pipe. A shooting star dropped swiftly.

As Varya approached the cottage she caught sight of Nikita. He was going towards the river with his fishing-rods. He did not notice her. Worse, he looked in her direction and did not recognize her. He went right past her down to the river.

Varya stopped and leaned against the trunk of a birch-tree. The birch was as slender as Varya herself. She trembled—either from emotion or from the chill of early morning. For a long time she stood there motionless. She saw Nikita sit down on the landing-boards, and she saw Ivan Ostapovich and Marina strolling along the bank, hand in hand. She heard a door bang, and the sound of voices coming from the biological station behind her. A well-chain rattled as it uncoiled.

It was quite light. Now she could see distinctly the stem of every reed on the other side of the river, and a minute later the meadow beyond, and the smoke rising from the houses at The Streams Kolkhoz. And now everything was visible, even things far, far away. A little black train was crawling along the horizon. It was going to Moscow. To-morrow it would take them there.

A chaffinch perched on a branch just over her head. It was so close to Varya, so distinct and dark against the light sky, that she could see the vibrations of its downy throat as it sang.

And birds were flying across the sky, so high that it was impossible to say what species they belonged to. Varya stood on tiptoe to follow their flight. Where were they going? What was it Gromada had said this very morning? "And birds will fly where we send them, where people need them...."